

THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

ORIGINAL NARRATIVES OF THE JAMES BOYS

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

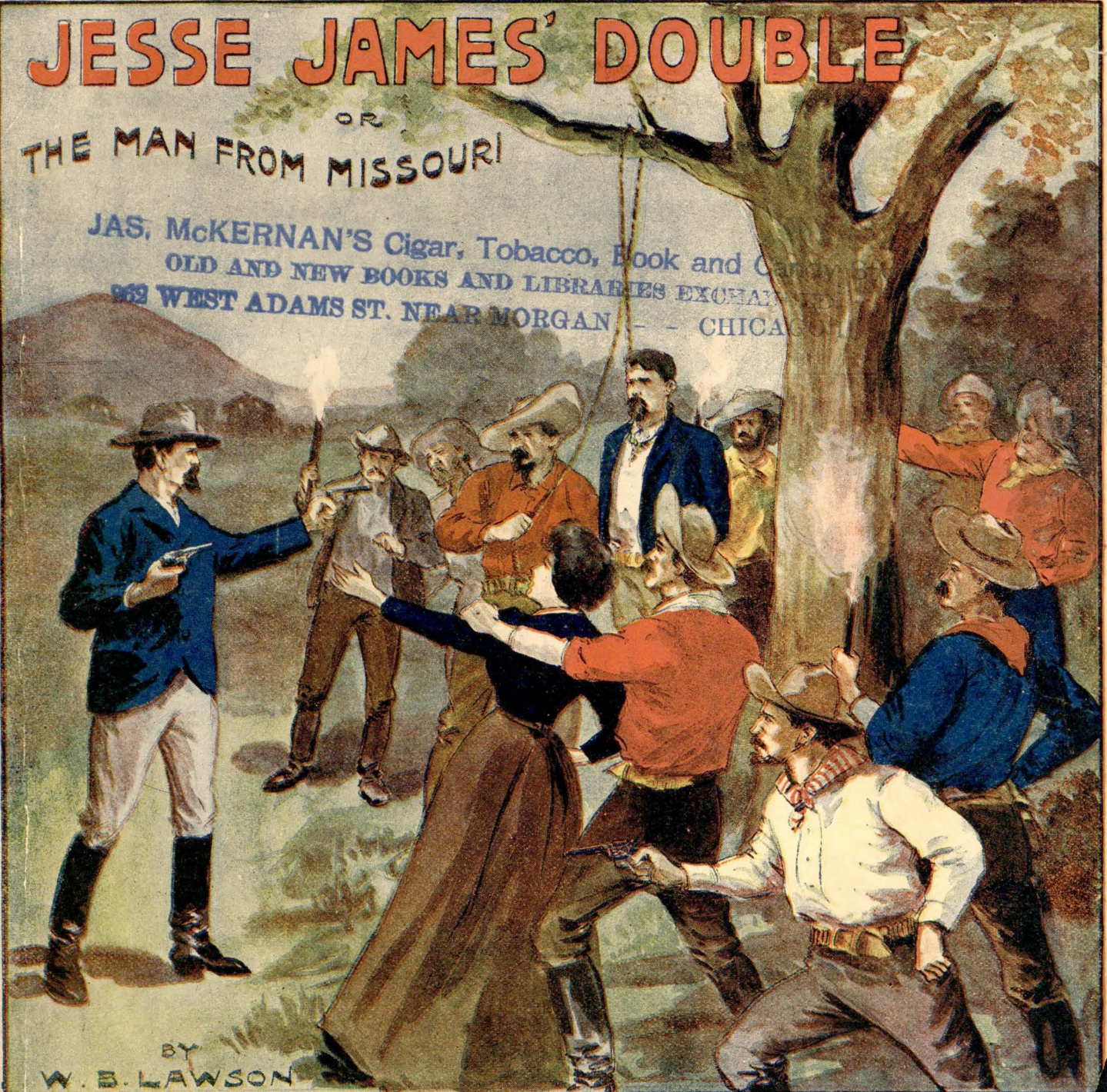
No. 10.

Price, Five Cents.

JESSE JAMES' DOUBLE

OR
THE MAN FROM MISSOURI

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BY
W. B. LAWSON

"LET THAT MAN GO!" COMMANDED THE NEWCOMER, COVERING THE LYNCHERS WITH TWO REVOLVERS. "THE REAL JESSE JAMES STANDS HERE."



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No. 10.

NEW YORK, July 13, 1901.

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JESSE JAMES' DOUBLE;

OR,

The Man From Missouri.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER I.

THE CALIFORNIA MINING CAMP.

"Call it fifty onzas, Pepito."

"Señor, he shall die."

"Do you promise?"

"I swear it."

"How long must I wait?"

"Give me twenty-four hours."

"Good. When you show me your work, the money shall pass into your hands."

Two men stood in the California mining town known as Battle Mountain.

It was in the fall of '69, and the glorious foliage on the mountains made the scene one of enchantment by day.

California grew rapidly after the close of the great Civil War, for thousands of the discharged soldiers wandered across the Rockies to the gold fields of the Pacific slope.

They had been taken from all conditions of life, but after years of army experience, many of them could not settle down again to the old routine of business.

In the quest for gold they found a vent for the wild spirit that had been born in the excitement of many a campaign.

Here, amid these grand mountains of the Golden State, old-time friends and foes often came face to face, once more.

Sometimes feuds that had been started in Kentucky or Missouri years ago, were taken up and brought to a termination in far-away California.

The two men who had just struck a bargain that seemed to mean the taking of human life, turned and entered the large dance-hall that stood near at hand.

From this place came the sound of music, and it was evident that the rough miners of Battle Mountain were

bent upon enjoying themselves, after their own rude fashion.

As soon as darkness settled upon the camp such places as this were quick to flash their lights across the path of the pilgrim, inviting him in to look on, or take a hand in the enjoyment of the hour.

Few there were who could resist the seductive wooing of the fickle goddess of fortune. The gold upon the tables of the gamblers was a temptation, and games were in progress early and late.

It was all the same whether the pilgrim lost or won; in the former case the end came when he arose from the table broke; but if by chance he managed to fill his pockets, it was to make himself a marked man, and lucky indeed must he be to leave that den without being way-laid outside by some of the gamblers' accomplices.

Nearly four dozen men were in the place when the two entered.

Some were reeling around in a dance with brazen-faced partners, but the majority seemed interested in the games of chance. They had come here for gold, and the lust of money was a predominant trait in their make-up.

"Now, point out the man to me, señor."

"Look yonder; he bends over the one at play, and laughs."

"*Caramba!*"

"You appear surprised."

"He looks like a person I thought——"

"What?"

"He would be a tiger, but this lamb—*vaya, hombre*, I will devour him whole."

The Mexican laughed at the seemingly easy task before him, and failed to catch the queer expression on the face of his employer.

"Make no mistake, Pepito. He is a fighter. Choose your partner, and shoot to kill."

"Señor Buckram, consider it done."

"I am glad to see you so confident. When the thing is done, this—" tapping a protuberance in his pocket—"fifty golden onzas are yours."

"*Si, señor.*"

They separated then.

The man called Buckram wandered about the place, keeping his eye on the party he had pointed out to the Mexican, but it might be noticed that he avoided passing near the other.

While thus engaged he received a sudden shock as a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Buck, old boy, how are you?"

Wheeling, he faced the speaker, a muscular man, with a fierce-looking face, and the general air of a California desperado.

The sight of him seemed pleasing to Buckram, however, for he gripped the other's paw.

"Ben Arnold!" he ejaculated.

"You look kinder surprised, old hoss."

"I heard you were dead."

"Yes, they did give me a close call in that scrimmage down at Lone Pine Bar, but ye see I came out ahead. I started a graveyard for the boys in the deal."

The desperado chuckled as he spoke.

Taking human life was an old story with him, and

counted as naught, so long as he saved his own miserable body.

"See here, Ben, I've heard it said you feared no man in California."

"That's the truth, too."

"We've had some additions to our camp of late among them some old friends of yours."

"Eh? You don't say," moving uneasily.

"Turn your eyes yonder—third table toward the dlers—see that man with the soft black hat—wait—he turns his head this way, and perhaps you'll recognize him."

Just at this juncture the party mentioned glanced the direction of the door, and the lamplight fell full upon his face.

It was astonishing to note the effect upon Ben Arnold. The big desperado started, leaned forward, actually glared at the party whom Buckram had indicated the Mexican to pick a quarrel with and put out of way.

A fearful oath oozed from Arnold's lips.

His companion was chuckling.

"Do you know that man, Ben?" he asked.

"Yes. It is that devil from Missouri—the man with nine lives—Jesse James," was the startling reply met by the cowed bravo.

"Just as true as gospel, man."

"What does he want here?"

"Well, you see he got in a big mess East and was sent through the lungs. Frank had a bullet in his hip. He told Jesse a sea voyage would build him up, and he made it. His brother joined him, and during the summer they've been living with an uncle and getting well."

"He looks as tough as a pine knot now."

"Yes, and I reckon the James boys have felt an itch for adventure, so they've come up to the mines with old Missouri pards."

"Who might they be?"

"Silas Barker and Tom Triggs."

The desperado shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, them four kin clean out Battle Mountain C if so be they take a notion."

"Nonsense!"

"Buckram, you don't know as much as I do about t boys."

"And I don't want to."

"They're tigers on the shoot. I'd rather face a company o' Uncle Sam's boys than Jesse James when mad is up."

"Perhaps so, but he's going to get into trouble before this night is old."

Ben looked at him quickly.

"D'ye mean that?"

"I do, pard."

"Tell me what's in the wind."

"I have cause to hate Jesse James, and I believe I could shoot me on sight if he recognized me. But this scare my face makes a different man of me, and my own face would pass me on the street without speaking."

"Did he give you that?"

Buckram nodded his head, and gritted his strong, yellow teeth savagely.

"Yes. I used to hunt with Jesse James, but we had a few words, and he shot me down like a dog, unarmed."

"was. It's a way he has. I'd as soon think of looking for mercy from a grizzly bear as from him!"

"Well?"

"He thought I was dead, and believes so yet, but I managed to live, and, leaving my old haunts, came out here, where a homely man has as much chance as the next one, providing he's quick on the trigger."

"But the plot against him?"

"Wait. I've hired two men to do him up."

"Two! A dozen couldn't do it."

"That remains to be seen. I've known the best man in the mines to go down before a tenderfoot. A bullet counts, no matter who sends it."

"Just so; but you couldn't hire me to be one of them wo."

"I suppose not, Ben; but you'll stay and see the fun?"

"Perhaps."

"If they lay out Pepito and his pard, here are forty men as will crowd 'em to the wall. You see the odds—four agin' forty."

"Yes, and it'll be a bad thing for the forty; you mark my words."

"Ben, you're a regular croaker."

"Well, I know them boys, and ought to. They can't be killed. I've seen 'em pass through scenes that would lay out any ordinary man. When Jesse James goes under it will be at the hands of a traitor while he sleeps."

"What brings you to this camp?"

"A little business of a private nature. If I'd known they was here, I reckon I'd stayed away."

"Nonsense. You have plenty of friends in this shanty, old man. Be your old self. They wouldn't dare pick a quarrel here."

"I don't know as there's much them boys skeer at. I've seen 'em do dare-devil things as wouldn't be believed if I told 'em. However, I'm goin' to hang around an' see what comes of it all. I wish you success."

"That's what I'm in this deal for."

Ben Arnold imagined he saw the eyes of the man he feared roaming in his direction, and immediately slunk away.

Bravo that he was, a terror among the miners of the coast range, he proved a veritable coward when in the presence of the guerrillas who had fought under Quantrell, the scourge of Missouri.

Buckram, left alone, leaned against the bar, and surveyed the throng, searching for the other three Missourians, whom he knew to be present.

They were not far away from Jesse James, and, knowing the men so well, he could easily pick them out.

Then he looked for Pepito.

The Mexican was discovered talking with a man who was known as the most adroit gambler in the camp, and from their actions it was easy to be seen that they were talking business.

The gambler grinned as he surveyed the man who was to be his victim.

Evidently he thought he had an easy thing, and he was not the first man who had made this mistake in connection with the outlaw from Missouri.

The looks of the James boys belied their natures.

Frank was quiet and Jesse congenial, but one might converse with them an hour and have no suspicion that he had been in communion with two of the boldest rascals

the West ever knew—men who scorned death and danger, and whose names had long caused a shudder to pass up and down the Mississippi Valley.

Appearances are often deceptive.

The wolf sometimes dons sheep's clothing, the better to secure his prey, and when in a civilized land Jesse James was more than once taken for a young parson.

Buckram was watching the progress of the game, and speculating upon the result of the deal he had in motion, when his attention was suddenly called to another quarter by something not down on the programme, at least as he had arranged the scenes.

CHAPTER II.

DECLINED WITH THANKS.

There was a stage at one end of the hall, and upon this appeared the proprietor to announce a new attraction in the shape of a lady singer, who had come up from San Francisco in the stage coach.

He begged that the miners would cease all talk and play for the present, and in return promised them a treat.

Then with a flourish he introduced—

"Señorita Inez Carmen."

She swept forward upon the rude stage, and the audience at once became spellbound, not at sight of a handsome woman alone, for these were not the days of '49, when a woman was a rarity in a mining camp, but because something in the manner of the songstress chained their senses.

She stood there for a full minute, gazing from one group of faces to another, perfectly self-possessed.

One might even believe she sought a certain person among those present; but if she found him, no sign betrayed the fact.

Then suddenly her lips parted, and a flood of melody rang through that hall.

It had ere now echoed with oaths, rude laughter, and even the crack of the deadly revolver, but never had the tones of a woman's rich voice filled it with song.

No matter what she sang—it was some old ballad like the "Swanee River," but when the señorita finished she was greeted with a whirlwind of applause.

Men clapped and shook hands, acting like crazy creatures—some tossed handfuls of gold coins upon the stage, while others gave a tribute in the shape of minute bags of gold dust, holding an ounce perhaps.

The manager ran out, and, collecting these offerings on a tray, presented them to the singer, with the request that she favor them again.

This she did, singing song after song.

They seemed never to tire of hearing her, but when half an hour had passed the proprietor announced that as the lady's voice had shown signs of weariness, she would sing them one more song, after which they must be considerate and allow her to retire.

She sang "Home, Sweet Home."

The room was crowded, more than three-score having entered while the singing went on.

Probably a rougher crowd could not have been found in the mines, and yet, while she sang that touching ballad, more than one grizzled miner might have been seen to draw the sleeve of his flannel shirt across his eyes, as

buried recollections stalked before his memory—few there are who have not at some period in life had a home.

Amid a deadly silence the songstress ceased; made a bow, and retired.

The business of gaming went on; but there were some who had played before who got up and left the place now.

That song had aroused the better feelings in their hearts, and for a night at least they could not bear to be found in such company.

Fully two-score remained.

They represented the worst elements in the mining town—their souls had been too long steeped in sin to feel any remorse, and when the little entertainment was over, they turned to their games with renewed zest.

The señorita passed back of the little stage to a small room.

There a man awaited her, who proved to be no other than Ben Arnold.

He gazed upon the small tray full of gold coins and dust that she had laid down, and then asked eagerly:

"Well, did you find your man, señorita?"

"He is here."

"Good. Does he know you?"

"I am sure he could not—this stain alters my looks completely."

"Have I done my part?" eying the gold as a hungry hawk might a spring chicken.

"Yes; take your pay, Arnold," she replied.

He waited for no further invitation, but had the offerings of the audience in his pockets before one could count ten.

She watched him with a scornful look.

"Are you ready to help me further?"

"Yes."

"And will do what I say?"

"I reckon you can rely on me."

"You are a brave man, and will not fail me."

"What do you want done?"

"As I said before, the man I seek is here in that room. It is my desire to have him in my power. You must capture him."

"It shall be done."

"This very night."

"Where will you have him taken?"

"Do you know the cabin occupied by the fortune-teller, Saidee?"

"Yes."

"I will be there to receive him. Remember, you must do him no injury."

"To capture a strong man and do him no injury is a hard job, but I'll try and oblige. If I succeed—"

"The ring is yours," and she held up her hand, upon a finger of which was a ring containing a large, handsome diamond.

"It is a bargain, señorita. Since you don't want this man injured, I imagine he is not an enemy you hate."

"He is—my husband!"

Arnold started.

"Ah! I begin to see; he ran away, perhaps, after another face. He is a fool, then."

"Never mind what the secret is—it is between him and me. Your duty is plain."

"But do you mean to tell me that if your husband was there while you sang he would fail to recognize your

voice, even if your face was stained and your hair dyed black?"

"He knows not that I can sing."

"Strange, and he your husband."

"Our story is out of the common, and there is no need of my telling it," she said, decisively.

Arnold bit his lip; this beauty fascinated him, and he was very curious to know her past history, but she baffled him.

"Of course not, señorita; pardon my rudeness. But you have forgotten one thing."

"What is that?"

"This man's name."

The singer hesitated a minute.

"It is David Graham."

She watched him while speaking, but Arnold gave no sign that he recognized the name.

"You have not met him, then?"

"I never heard the name, but perhaps I've known the man, all the same."

"Easy enough. One-half the men in yonder room, I reckon, are sailing under false colors."

"You mean they have other names than the ones they now bear?"

"Yes. Lots of them have been in trouble down East, and came to the Pacific slope for the good of their country, to begin life anew, and under such circumstances, it was only natural that they would take new names."

"Then I shall have to point him out to you."

"That will be the only way."

"How will you capture him?"

Arnold drew his big frame up and laughed.

"Most men are puppets in my hands. You see, all I have to do is to tell a chap what I want and he does it. Ben Arnold is known in these diggings as a bad man to tackle."

"Tell me what you will do?" she asked.

"Me? Oh, I'll step up to the fellow and ask him if his name is Davy Graham. Then I'll slip my arm in his and tell him I've got some news of importance for him, which can only be told outside. Of course, he'll go with me, can't resist the influence, you know," chuckling.

"And then?"

"Once in the street I'll bring another kind of influence to bear upon him, a species of gentle persuader," and he significantly touched the butt of a heavy Colt's revolver that was thrust in his belt.

"It all seems easy enough. When will you do this for me, Mr. Arnold?"

"Say inside of half an hour."

"That will do nicely. Remember, any injury done to him I will avenge myself."

Arnold whistled softly.

"Jupiter! this is a queer business, meddling between husband and wife. The less I have to do in that role the better. She loves and yet she hates him."

"Ah! that is because you do not understand a woman, Mr. Arnold. There is always a species of the tiger in her love—the man who scorns her must beware."

"I could understand it all if you wanted me to lay this man out; I know what hate is."

"I didn't say I hated him. I must see him face to face; there is something to be explained between us. When

that has been done either the gulf will be bridged or else made impassable. Your duty is to fetch him to me at the cabin of the fortune-teller within the half hour."

"No time like the present, señorita. That ring would look well on my little finger."

"Earn it."

"Just what I'm intendin' to do. Come, point out the man to me, and then go to the cabin, where you can sit down and wait."

"I do not want to appear before those men again. Is there no way in which we can look in upon them without being seen?"

He reflected a minute.

"How about one of the windows?"

"Are they high?"

"Not over four or five feet from the ground."

"Then I should think they would do. You are acquainted about this place. Lead me to the outer air by the small door."

Arnold at once obeyed.

He coveted the beautiful ring she had promised him for a reward, and was anxious to earn it, believing the task would be one of the easiest he had ever attempted.

Once in the open air, they were soon standing under the row of windows from whence came light and sounds.

These openings were not over three feet square, and on account of the heat within, were all open.

Without any particular effort they could gaze upon the busy scene within, watch the play of the gamblers, or even study the emotions that marked their stern-set faces.

It was a sight such as has cursed every new mining country in the world. The demons of drink and gambling are the besetting sins that send many a man to his grave.

It will be always thus. Daring spirits venture into these wild regions, and the clash of opposing factions must result.

The two stood at the opening.

"Show me Davy Graham, señorita, and I'll show you the man I mean to take under my wing in about ten minutes, and convey to you. Point out the critter, so I can fasten my eagle gaze on him, and he's my meat."

"That is easily done. He sits at the table beside the post—see, he deals the cards. That is the man you have promised to capture for me."

Arnold's eyes opened like saucers.

"That man with the felt hat pushed back from his forehead, with the quiet look about him—is he that runaway husband you're trying to hire me to capture? Excuse me, madam, but a dozen such rings couldn't tempt me to take the risk. I must decline, with thanks. When I'm fool enough to try and put a whirlwind in my pocket, you'll find me just up to such capers as capturing Jesse James. I happen to know this husband of yours, señorita, as the toughest devil of a fighter in all America. Good-evening."

CHAPTER III.

THE DANGER LINE.

Ben Arnold turned as though he meant to walk away, but he did not take three steps before the hand of the woman was on his arm again.

"Stop!"

"What is it now, señorita?"

"I wish a few words with you."

"It is all useless. I wouldn't undertake the job for all the gold dust in the camp."

And he meant every word of it, too.

"There must be some mistake," she cried.

"Mistake? Yes, it was a big one when I ever promised to do as you said."

"No, no; I mean about the man."

"You said he was your husband."

"He looks wonderfully like him, and yet one of us is wrong. If that is the notorious Jesse James, as you declare, then he cannot be the party I am seeking."

Arnold looked interested.

"There may be something in that. I've known two men to look alike before. Now, I'm sure this man is the one I speak of. That's Frank James at the same table. Then, as you say, it can't be David Graham."

"No, no; my Davy is not a wicked man like Jesse James. He never took human life. It is terrible to think they look the same!"

Arnold was possessed of an idea—when one came to him he was in the habit of seizing it with bulldog pertinacity, and holding on.

"See here; how long have you known this man you call Davy?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because, the thought struck me that perhaps Jesse James might have changed his name when he came to California."

At this she was overwhelmed with confusion.

"That would kill me, indeed; but it is absurd. My Davy is a man of honor, and not an outlaw, hunted with a price on his head."

"You didn't answer my question," he persisted.

"How long have I known Davy?"

"Yes."

"About six months."

"Since last spring?"

"Yes."

"Ah! Jesse James came to California then."

"Horror!"

"So you see, madam, in spite of your belief in Davy, it may be that he and the terrible outlaw of Missouri are one."

"Let me look at him again."

She remained at the window several minutes watching the players, and then turned to her athletic companion.

"Well?" asked Arnold.

"That man is not Davy."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Every person has a way of doing things, and I know Davy's habits. This man does the same things in an entirely different way."

"Men are deceivers ever, you know. He may have been acting a part when with you."

"It is not so."

Her manner suddenly changed; she became confident in her bearing, and Arnold's keen eyes noted this fact instantly.

"You have another reason for believing it, señorita," he said, quickly.

"Yes—there it is."

She pointed across the room to where a small group stood watching some interesting play.

Among the men standing there was one who at once riveted Arnold's attention.

He was built very much after the style of Jesse James, and his face resembled that of the Missouri outlaw in general features, although had one analyzed it, he might have discovered a considerable difference.

This, then, was Davy.

Arnold looked on the double of the notorious Jesse James, and then glanced at the original with something of wonder.

"I don't wonder you were deceived; I never saw men more alike. I'd like to bet they're some relations—cousins, perhaps. Did your Davy come from Missouri, señorita?"

She ignored his question.

"You see your man—will you lead him to me as you promised?" she asked.

"By the holy smoke, I will."

"There is no time like the present."

"I said inside of half an hour."

"Yes."

"And I'll do it if I can. Anyhow, I'll bring him to you when I have the chance."

"Good—the ring shall be yours."

"You are away?"

"The sooner I leave you, the quicker the work may be carried out."

"Shall I see you to the house of the fortune-teller? These streets are not exactly safe for a lady at this hour of the night."

It was evident that Arnold had once been a gentleman; one could hardly believe it looking at the rough bravo, but the wild life he had led for years in the gold mines was not conducive to polish or refinement.

She greeted his proposition scornfully.

"See, the moon is rising. What have I to fear? Besides, you see how I am armed," and she displayed a small but serviceable revolver.

"Where did you get that tool?"

"My husband gave it to me."

"Can you use it?"

"The first man who insults me will discover that fact to his cost."

"Did he teach you to shoot?"

"Yes. Davy is a champion pistol-shot."

"The deuce he is. I warrant you he'd stand a poor show against the man he resembles."

"Don't mention such a thing. There is no reason they should ever meet. I am going now. Keep your promise, Ben Arnold."

"I'll do my best, lady."

He watched her pass down the rough street, and shook his head wisely.

"I reckon as how she would use that ere little pop on a feller if he chanced to say somethin' she objected to. Well, I'm not in that game at all. Give me plenty of money and lick, and I'm content."

She vanished from his gaze.

No outcry or shot came up the street, and he presumed the songstress must have reached the house of the fortune-teller in safety.

Now the business in hand demanded that he give it his attention.

He turned once more to the window, bent upon making sure of his man ere entering.

Although his attention had only been diverted for a few minutes, hardly more than two in truth, the man whom he sought had vanished.

In vain did Arnold endeavor to discover him among the little knots gathered about the players—David Graham had disappeared as utterly as though the earth had opened and swallowed him.

This was exasperating.

Unless the man came in again very soon, Arnold certainly could not keep his word with the woman who called herself David Graham's wife, yet pursued him with some strange purpose.

When he had looked at all in the room and made sure that his man was not present, Arnold muttered a curse on his hard luck.

"Sure, he is like the Irishman's flea—now you think you have him, but when you raise your finger he ain't there. Never mind, I may have a chance to get him yet."

Thus muttering he looked in through the window and watched the play, keeping one eye on the door so that he might know if the man he sought came in again.

Once or twice a party entered, but it was not the one he sought.

Each time Arnold glanced up eagerly, only to meet with disappointment.

As the table at which the James boys played was nearer his window than any other, he watched their game, keeping as well in the shadow as he could, for well he knew what suspicious mortals these border outlaws were, and that if they discovered him thus spying on them, just as likely as not they would send a bullet into his brain without asking a question.

It was a way they had of teaching people to mind their own business.

Arnold knew them both, and feared them.

His actions had already declared this.

Truth to tell, he had ridden beside them in the awful raids of Quantrell's guerrilla band when they sacked the town of Lawrence and did other bloody deeds—these men had been brothers in the war's cruelties, but something had arisen to build up a wall of hate between them.

One thing interested Arnold.

In the antagonist of Jesse James he recognized Pepito, the Mexican whom Buckram had pointed out as the tool he had hired to accomplish his work.

No doubt the gambler, who was Pepito's partner in the game, was also pledged to down Jesse James.

Arnold smiled.

He could see with prophetic vision the inevitable result, and he almost pitied the two poor devils whom Buckram had used to further his plans.

Of course they were ignorant of the truth; had the dreadful names of their opponents been whispered into their ears those desperadoes would never have dared to carry out the game.

In their ignorance they stalked along to doom.

The James boys seldom drank, but both prided themselves on being good card-players, and being challenged

by the Mexican in a sneering manner to have a game, Jesse had at once accepted, hunting up his brother, and giving two friends a wink as he passed, that signified there was going to be music in the air.

Although, of course, he could not divine the exact motives of Pepito, in thus selecting him and offering a challenge, he nevertheless believed the man was up to some game which would open up a chance for excitement.

This being what they wanted, accounted for the readiness with which he had accepted the offer to play.

Watching their play, Arnold could not see that either side was making any impression.

The James boys were as clever with the pasteboards as their experienced opponents, and the fact soon began to gail the Mexican.

He scowled.

Arnold knew what would follow, and was prepared to witness an exciting scene.

Whichever way the affair went it did not matter to him—if the James boys were slain then the earth would be able to rest more in peace, as they were disturbing elements wherever they went. On the other hand, should the fight go against the gamblers, Arnold rejoiced to know that he would see his old comrades on their mettle.

They pursued different trails now, and were foes, but he could never forget that they had once ridden together under Quantrell.

Men who brave danger side by side always have a certain regard for each other, even though they meet again as foes.

The explosion could not be far off.

When the watcher at the window saw the Mexican wink to his comrade, he knew the decisive moment had arrived.

They meant to institute a series of cheats in order to beat their opponents.

Along the border such a thing merits death, for even a gambler can lay claim to being a square man. All depended upon the fact whether the little game could be detected.

Cards were played, for the game was the American one of poker.

When the hands were shown it turned out that the Mexican held three kings.

Frank James had given place to one of the friends from Missouri, who laid down his hand.

"Three aces," he said, raking in the pot.

Then looking squarely at the Mexican until the latter scowled, he said quietly:

"It wouldn't be safe for you to try that same trick again, Señor Pepito."

"Good," ejaculated Arnold, "they're on to the thief."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BATTLE IS ON.

At these significant words from the holder of the three aces the Mexican scowled more fiercely than ever.

"Carajo! what do you say?" he growled.

"Just this, and I want you to hear me. I discarded a king myself, and saw a second on the bottom of the pack as you dealt. You have three; therefore you slipped out the bottom card from the pack for yourself. Again I warn you that it won't be safe to try that a second time."

His words were plainly heard through the large room, and every man ceased dealing or playing on the instant.

Such a charge as that meant trouble.

A man accused of cheating has but one redress, and this is his revolver.

Jesse James knew this fact better than his friend, and hence prepared for action.

He kept his eyes glued on the Mexican, while his hand crept in the direction of his weapon.

His suspicion was confirmed.

"You lie!" hissed Pepito.

The chance he wanted had come. He did not mean to murder the man who had flung the charge in his face; but his first shot was to be in the direction of the party whom he had engaged to kill for fifty golden onzas.

Like a good many other men who from time to time became engaged in a personal controversy with Jesse James, this poor devil was too slow on the shoot.

He succeeded in drawing his pistol to be sure, but precious little good it did him, for hardly had the weapon come forth from his belt than a bullet from the revolver of the Missourian outlaw apparently cut his heart in twain.

Pepito fell back in his chair. So suddenly had oblivion come to this wicked man that he was not even given the chance of muttering the name of his favorite patron saint.

To be ushered from a life of crime into an eternity of woe! such seemed to be his fate.

Meanwhile the gambler had not been idle.

When Jesse's friend accused his dark-faced partner of deliberate cheating, this man seemed to realize that something had to drop.

He depended on the blade in preference to the revolver, and at the instant Jesse James fired his first shot this fellow was flourishing a fearful knife, built upon the Bowie pattern.

With this he made a fierce lunge directly at the heart of the Missouri outlaw.

Had the blade served its master faithfully, it would have made an end of the notorious train and bank robber then and there; but they say Satan often cares for his own, and it seemed like it in this instance.

It chanced that Jesse James had been in the habit of carrying a buckskin pouch filled with gold dust in the left breast-pocket of his coat.

The knife struck this, and its forward progress was arrested. An inch to one side and the Missourian must have been slain.

It was one of the very marvelous narrow escapes this man had in his wonderful life of adventure.

Quick as a flash Jesse James turned that death-dealing revolver over his arm—the gambler was over his left shoulder, and had partly risen from his chair in order to add force to the blow with which he meant to end the other.

When that finger pressed the fatal trigger the muzzle of the revolver was close to the man's head, and the bullet sunk deep in his brain.

He never knew what hurt him, but fell forward upon the gambling table, a ghastly sight.

Such a terrible tragedy of a double nature had probably never taken place in this hall before.

What was apt to add coals to the fire was the fact that while the slain men were citizens of the camp, the victors in the little affair had been looked on as pilgrims—strangers.

At any rate the fight was on.

Frank James and the others of Quantrell's old guerrilla band sprang forward to the assistance of their comrades.

It was forty to four.

Such terrible odds might have overwhelmed some men, but not these human tigers.

They gloried in scenes of danger and bloodshed.

Almost every awful charge on the decalogue of crime has been brought against the James boys; probably scores of men have gone to death at their hands, sometimes in fair fight during the war, and again murdered in cold blood for some trivial cause.

No one has ever dared to charge them with being cowards in a physical sense.

Time and again they fought ten or twenty foes—fierce, merciless as they might be, but surely possessed of the animal bravery that leads the tiger-cat of the Indian jungle to leap into the center of a circle of foes, rending and tearing, until riddled with wounds, it falls.

Such were these strange outcasts of the border.

After the war they had gained such notoriety as fiends in human shape from having done such deadly execution under the guerilla flag they served that people laid everything that happened at their door, and, driven by irresistible circumstances into outlawry, they determined that since they had the name they might as well have the game, and so they renewed their career of rapine and murder.

These were the men who now found themselves facing two score of furious miner-gamblers, in the camp of Battle Mountain.

Frank James, as cool as a cucumber, swept Jesse's earnings into his pocket, spattered as the coins were by the blood of the man who had last been shot.

Then he, too, drew his revolver and prepared for hot work.

Every game was called on the spot.

Men snatched up their money or little bags of gold dust, and, roaring out oaths, pressed forward toward the daring quartet.

Jesse James was never more cool in his life than at this moment.

Blood enough had already been shed—he would make one effort to avert the tremendous conflict impending.

Revolver in hand, he sprang upon the table, and raised his hand.

Silence ensued.

They would at least hear him.

It was a strange scene, and one that could never be forgotten by those who saw it.

The gamblers were pressing forward with fierce looks; women shrank into the corners and held their breath; weapons were seen on all hands, and, mounted upon the bloody table, with the smoke still curling from the muzzle of his death-dealing revolver, stood the central figure of all.

"Men, listen to me. These parties cheated my friend and me. When we denounced them, they would have taken our lives only that I was too quick on the trigger.

Any one of you would have done just what I did. Was I right?"

A few fair-minded men present called out in the affirmative, but their voices were drowned in a roar of rage from the mob, who had already decided that no matter how just was the cause of the strangers, they must die to atone for the bloody work just done.

Again the defiant man on the table raised his left hand.

Once more the shouting ceased.

Before carrying out their decree and riddling him with balls, they were willing to accord him a hearing, though it would make no difference what he said.

"Gentlemen, I want to introduce myself and then, perhaps, some one of you would like to have it out. You may have heard of me. I am Jesse James, of Missouri, and this is my brother Frank."

The crowd was momentarily awed, for the infamous deeds of these outlaw brothers had reached even the California gold fields.

Buckram was in the rear.

He had witnessed the sudden doom that had descended upon his creatures, and chuckled to think that now he would probably attain his end without having to pay the price of blood.

When he saw the momentary confusion that came upon the gambling horde at the mention of that dreaded name, he knew something must be done, and that immediately, or else his prey would yet escape him.

He hated Jesse James with all the venom that one rascal can bear toward another who has used him as a stepping-stone in the past, and cast him aside when he had no further need of his services.

"What he says is false, men. I give him the lie thus."

So saying, Buckram discharged his revolver and sent a bullet through the hat of the man who stood upon the table.

"Ah! you're there, Jack Buckram; I know you, and recognize your work."

As he spoke Jesse James fired without raising his revolver from his hip.

It was a seemingly careless shot, but this man was so skillful that he could do wonders with the revolver, and this piece of business was an old favorite of his.

Buckram knew it, too, and saved his own miserable life by sprawling upon the floor just at the second the other fired.

It happened, however, that a man was passing across the room beyond, making for the door, and the bullet buried itself in the calf of his leg.

He immediately shrieked out that he was a dead man, and, calling upon all his good friends to avenge his fall, dropped to the floor to hug his wounded leg, and at the same time keep out of reach of flying missiles.

This unforeseen event set the ball rolling again, for it seemed as though the battle had really opened.

Jesse James realized that he could not hope to stem the tide.

"If you must have it, come on, and we will show you how Quantrell's men fight!" he called aloud.

Then, seeing several weapons being raised, he jumped from the table just as a storm of bullets cut the air where he had stood.

The scene that ensued almost baffles description; it would take a pen of fire to do the battle justice.

Weapons cracked, men shouted, women screamed, and loud oaths or shrieks told when a leaden messenger had found a lodgment in a human body.

The tobacco smoke had been dense before, but now burned powder added its quota, and as light after light was extinguished, either through accident or design, a gloom quickly settled over the scene that was like a pall.

Still the awful sounds went on.

The four Missourians fought like devils, and laid their mark upon all around.

They made it a point to keep together, knowing that to separate was to lose the battle.

Little by little, as they fought, they worked their way in the direction of the door.

Soon their revolvers would be empty, and unless they were out of this holocaust, it was likely the doom they visited upon others would be brought home to them.

Nearly a dozen men had fallen.

Some were killed outright, others wounded more or less severely; but had an electric light been flashed suddenly upon the room it would have revealed a scene sickening in its character.

It was a veritable charnel-house of death, and the most terrible night ever known in the mining camp of Battle Mountain.

The door was near at hand, but the enemy had possession of it.

As the moon shone without they could see a struggling throng at the door; two stout men in attempting to get out had become fast, and their struggles prevented the blockade from being raised.

Frank James sprang at them with a shout and began hammering one of them with his heavy revolver, and at the same time keeping up a steady push.

CHAPTER V.

A TRAIL OF BLOOD.

Thanks to this energetic treatment, the blockade was soon broken; one of the burly land pirates being shoved out into the open, while the other was roughly drawn inside.

The passage being clear by this time, Frank James allowed one of his friends to pass by, followed by the second.

Still the uproar and confusion existed within.

A few of the gamblers knew their enemies were escaping, but they were unable to make themselves understood, such was the furor—men shouting, cursing, groaning, shrieking, until the babel of sounds seemed deafening in the confined space.

Frank could not see his brother.

Had Jesse fallen?

Perhaps the fate he had courted so often in his wild past had descended upon him at last.

Was he doomed to meet his death in the midst of this whirl of excitement?

Frank James glared about him like an enraged tiger about to leap.

If he found reason to believe Jesse had been downed, and lay there either dead or wounded, he would have rushed back into the *mêlée*, and have stood over the fallen man.

At this moment, however, there was a rush of feet near by.

A man's flying figure loomed up.

The party made a leap for one of the small openings denominated windows, and passed through.

It was the Missouri outlaw.

Engaged in a hot hand-to-hand encounter with some of the enemy near by, he was not aware of the fact that the door was open, and had taken this means of gaining the outside.

As luck would have it, in making this leap he landed squarely upon Ben Arnold, who at that moment chanced to be passing.

This latter individual had been near the door, and when Frank James opened a passage those outside fell hastily back, Arnold among the number.

When this heavy weight came plunging upon his shoulders from the window, Arnold, giant though he was, went to the ground.

He struggled desperately, and almost unconsciously seized hold of the man who had thus descended upon him, as it were, from the skies.

Jesse James was in a fighting mood.

At such times he was a terror.

Woe to the unlucky wretch who fell into his hands when he was crazy with the excitement of battle; the scenes he had witnessed and shared in during the past urged him on to new deeds of blood and crime.

Mercy he knew not.

Living by violence, he was accustomed to appealing to the god of war whenever beset.

His revolvers were empty, for he had fired the last shot in order to shake off the half-crazed miner-gamblers who had clung to him like so many leeches, determined to hold him in order to have revenge for the fallen.

Most of those leaden messengers had done terrible execution, for this fiend of a man was not in the habit of shooting unless he hit the mark at which he aimed.

At the time of making his leap through the open window, the outlaw grasped one of these heavy six-shooters in his hand.

Quick as thought, when he found himself assailed by the unknown, upon whose back he had leaped by accident, he brought this weapon down upon the other's head several times, exclaiming:

"Hold Jesse James, will you—take that, and that, and that, you fool!"

Arnold realized that he had caught hold of a Tartar, and that he was a doomed man unless he could break away.

A giant in stature, he was possessed of uncommon strength, and if ever he needed that power it was now.

With a Herculean effort, and a roar of fright, he humped his back, shook the outlaw from him as a terrier might a rat, and leaped away.

Any delay would certainly have cost him his life, for Jesse James had his blood up, and was not sparing any living thing that came under his hand.

Thus the four friends were united just outside the gambling-hall.

Wounds had been received, but none of them were serious enough to keep them from flight.

It was necessary that they start soon, for their enemies were already issuing from the building by means of doors.

and windows, a boiling, seething crowd crazy for revenge.

This brief halt had been called a dozen paces away from the building with a double object in view.

In the first place, they desired to see how serious their wounds were, for when the battle is raging men have often been ignorant of the fact that they were badly wounded until the faintness caused by loss of blood causes an investigation—such is the excitement that seizes upon one when engaged in a hot fight.

In the second place, there were few cartridges left in any of their revolvers, and it was absolutely necessary that these weapons should be charged afresh, lest the enemy make a last and overwhelming attack upon them.

Having spare cartridges at hand, it did not take them long to charge the cylinders afresh, and when this had been done they felt able to resist almost any charge made upon them.

The excitement that had reigned within the dance hall had now been transferred to the street; a great crowd was collecting, and loud shouts rang out as numerous would-be leaders called upon the men to do this or that thing.

So long as the quartet remained in view the mob made no move.

They had already tested the mettle of these men and found it not to their liking.

When, however, the James boys and their two Missouri companions began to move away, the crowd followed after—at first at a respectable distance, but gradually drawing nearer.

The inevitable consequence of this must be more bloodshed.

Evidently the gamblers of Battle Mountain had not yet received their fill of fighting, or else the desire to avenge their fallen comrades was stronger than their fear of the revolvers of the escaping Missourians.

On they pressed.

The mining camp was left behind, and they were now well out upon the trail leading to Minnemunca.

Even cowardly wolves and coyotes will venture to attack a fleeing enemy, and it was not at all wonderful that these men, believing their enemies were afraid because they were in full flight, should follow them with increasing boldness.

The quartet paid no attention to their pursuers until nearly a mile had been passed over, and by this time the miners had become so daring that they ventured to open fire on the fugitives.

Bullets whistled by close to their ears.

The situation was growing serious again, and something must be done.

All of the others looked to Jesse James for a sign. Although younger than his brother, he had generally taken the lead in all the desperate enterprises in which they had engaged.

At last this man came to a sudden pause, and they knew he meant business. The yelling pack of pursuers must again feel their wolf teeth.

"Boys, this has gone far enough. The quarrel was none of our seeking, but we'll have to stand our share of it. Get ready to give the cowards particular fits."

This meant business.

When the four hunted men suddenly wheeled and

faced the mob of fierce pursuers, it did not look as though they could withstand the rush of such a body.

Led by a desperate fighter, who had survived the affair in the hall, the gamblers of Battle Mountain rushed on.

Jesse James waved them back.

Blood enough had been spilled on this night to satisfy the most exacting lust for excitement; but the affair was on, and, once started, no effort on their part could stop the wheel.

"Keep back, you fools! Don't you know enough to get in out of the wet when it rains? We have fought you once before on this night to escape from that hell-hole, and you will find us ready to give some more of the same kind of medicine. If you're set on it, step up, gentlemen, and get your little pills."

They answered him with shouts and curses.

Had he fallen alive into the hands of these men they would have torn the outlaw limb from limb, so furiously were they stirred.

A bombshell exploding in the midst of the mining camp could hardly have created more consternation and destruction than had been wrought by the coming of Jesse James.

Nor was this all. Shots began to be fired at the quartet. One of them was wounded, and a ball again tore through the leader's hat.

The crowd advanced steadily.

Soon a torrent of lead would sweep the ground where the fugitives stood at bay.

"Steady, boys!"

They took aim.

"Make each shot count. Leave that leader to me. Ready; let loose!"

Four revolvers flashed in the face of the advancing host, and, held in the hands of men who had played at guerrilla warfare for years, these trusty weapons were not apt to be discharged unless there was some definite result.

The shouting leader of the assailants went down instantly, his arms threshing the air like so many flails.

Jesse James seldom missed.

Others, too, had received the benefit of the volley, and such was the result of the blow that the body of men came to a staggering halt.

"Again!"

Once more four shots sounded almost as a unit, and more damage resulted among the citizens.

They became demoralized.

Some turned and ran away.

Finding their supports gone, the bravest of the assailants weakened.

There was no need of further bloodshed; in five minutes not a living man could be seen; a few parties had crept behind the rocks for shelter, but the main body had fled down the pass in the direction of the mining camp.

Nothing now lay in the way to prevent the four Missourians from making good their retreat from the scene.

The awful fight was over.

Battle Mountain camp had been scourged as if by fire, and her graveyard on the hill would receive an addition presently, when the victims of this night were buried with their boots on.

It would hardly be safe for the James boys to be found among the mining camps after this terrible work.

They would be marked men, and the hand of every miner raised against them.

When the attacking party melted away so miraculously, the moonlight fell upon several prostrate forms, one of which moved and groaned, but the quartet of fugitives had no time to spare attending to wounded men.

"Come, let's vamoose the ranch. We've had a lively time, and made it hot for 'em."

So saying, Jesse James turned and led off.

CHAPTER VI.

"LEAD ON."

There was certainly a wild commotion in the mining town when those who had ridden after the outlaws came back with a number of dead and wounded comrades to report that the four Missourians had defeated them in a square stand-up fight.

What added fire to the matter was the fact that as far as they knew their enemies had not even been wounded.

They had all gotten away, that was sure.

If anything could make miners mad it was such a case as this.

Ben Arnold had not taken any part in the desperate affair.

He believed he knew how it would terminate, having such a knowledge of the men against whom the miners-gamblers of Battle Mountain had seen fit to wage war.

This proved that Ben had a long head.

He chuckled to himself when he saw how the men of Battle Mountain were defeated.

There was little sleep done in Battle Mountain camp the rest of that night.

One by one the victims of the Missouri desperadoes were brought out and laid in a row.

It was a ghastly sight.

Others groaned in their tents, and called down maledictions on the heads of the James boys.

This was war.

The story must be soon carried through all the mining camps of California, and as there was a peculiar bond of sympathy existing among the men of this class, it would hardly be safe for the James boys to remain much longer in the Golden State.

They were apt to be mobbed anywhere, while many men would lie in ambush to shoot them down unawares.

Along toward three o'clock, the camp quieted down a little, though men could be seen here and there as they hurried about on some mission.

Several riders had been dispatched to other mining camps with the news, and it was resolved to call a mass meeting of citizens, to determine what should be done.

Sleep being out of the question, the men were already gathered in the vicinity of the open square in the center of the camp.

This was called a plaza.

While Ben Arnold was walking along the street toward the plaza, he saw a man just ahead of him.

There was nothing singular in this, but Ben noticed his figure and gait, and he was struck with a resemblance to that of the man he had guaranteed to bring to Señorita Inez at the house of the fortune-teller.

Yes, he was almost ready to swear, even before he saw the man's face, that this was the party who looked like Jesse James.

If such it should prove to be, his lucky star was certainly in the ascendant.

He must see.

The man's hat was drawn low over his face.

This, too, was a sign that he did not desire to be recognized.

As Arnold passed him, his foot seemed to catch upon some obstacle.

He made a sudden lurch, his hands flew out, and at the same time an exclamation of alarm and disgust came from his lips, as he apparently came near falling to the ground.

His ruse, cunningly conceived, was successful.

The other's felt hat was knocked from his head, and fell to the ground.

When Ben turned around, with a hasty apology, he looked full upon the face he desired to see.

The moonlight revealed its bearded contour.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, as though very much astonished.

"Well," replied the other, calmly.

Like a flash one hand had sought his belt, and rested upon a revolver.

Had Arnold made any hostile move, the chances were the hatless man would have bored him through and through on the instant, if he was half as speedy on the shoot as the singer had intimated to Arnold when speaking of her husband.

Ben acted his part.

"It's you, sure enough!" exclaimed Arnold.

"Who do you take me for?"

"David Graham."

"Ah!"

"I was lookin' for ye."

"Is it possible?"

"On a question of great importance."

"Sure you haven't made a mistake?"

"I reckon not. Ye was pointed out to me not many hours gone by."

"Where was that?"

"In the dance hall."

The other grinned.

"You were there?" pursued Arnold, having an object in view.

"Well, yes, I rather guess so."

Ben failed to catch the significance in the other's tones—he remembered later on, however, several things that did not appear out of the way to him then.

"I know I couldn't be mistaken."

"What d'ye want with me?"

"Some one desires to see you."

"The old complaint. Lots of people would like to see me, and there are others who wouldn't," replied the man, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"This party says it's a case of life and death."

"Most of them do," with a grin.

"She has hired me to bring you to her."

"She—Jove! it's a woman?"

"Yes."

"Who is she, man?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Not for my life."

"Still ye heard her sing."

The man started.

"What! the señorita?"

"Exactly."

"I never saw her before."

"Well, perhaps if she removed the stain from her face and the dye from her hair you might change your opinion."

The man looked at him attentively.

Then he smiled.

"You say she is disguised?"

"Yes."

"And she wants to see me?"

"Badly. Of course I do not want to force you to go, but it would be kind of you. A gentleman always obliges a lady."

The other mused.

Then he glanced toward the fire-lighted plaza, where the miners were assembling.

"I've half a notion to do it," he muttered.

"Change it to a whole one."

"It promises an adventure, anyway."

"I reckon."

"Where is this lady?"

"At the cabin of the fortune-teller."

"Well, lead on."

"You'll go," with a grin of delight, as he remembered the diamond ring.

"I reckon I will, seeing that I'm well able to take care of myself. Forward, Ben Arnold."

CHAPTER VII.

BEN ARNOLD'S BLUNDER.

Arnold turned upon the other.

"How—you know me?" he ejaculated.

"Perhaps you may have been pointed out to me. Some woman may want a private interview with Ben Arnold. But never mind. You're a well-known man around the diggings, I reckon, and it isn't singular I should know you."

"Perhaps not," replied Ben.

The subtle flattery implied by this delicate compliment quite mollified him.

To himself he was saying as he led the way in the direction of the fortune-teller's:

"How like in manner he is to the other, too. Glory! what a team they'd make, to be sure; but she said her husband was an honest man, and not to be classed with the likes of Jesse James."

The building which they were heading for was not far away.

A minute's walk would bring them to it.

Like most of the others in the mining town, it was a frame structure, one story in height, and not an architectural beauty by any means.

No doubt it answered all purposes required, and who could desire more.

A small sign hung out to the breeze, and upon this was artistically painted the name of the madam, and also the fact that she was able to tell secrets of past and future, for the sum of five dollars in gold.

Arnold had been given his cue.

He knew this was a strange hour to be knocking at any door, and especially one where a woman lived.

Battle Mountain camp was not apt to enjoy much sleep on this night, however, after all that had taken place there.

Besides, the signal given by the señorita would proclaim his identity.

He rapped upon the door in the manner she had described.

At first there was no response.

"Try it again," said his companion, who stood beside him, in a nonchalant manner watching all his motions.

The second summons was a success.

A window was opened, but not the blind.

"Who knocks?"

"One who wishes to see your guest," replied Arnold recognizing the voice as belonging to the fortune-teller—no old crone, by the way, but a bold, dashing woman, who had commanded the respect of the miners by the handy manner in which she used her pistols.

"My guest!" repeated the woman, as if desiring to draw him out.

"The señorita."

"Ah! she has long since retired."

"She will get up when she hears I have come."

"Who are you?"

"Ben Arnold."

"Do you bring news?"

"Something better."

"You have a companion."

"The party she wished to see."

"Is that true?"

"I give you my word for it."

"Enter, then, and I will let her know."

The door opened automatically, and a light was seen beyond.

They entered.

Arnold had been here before, and knew the reception-room of the madam was on the right.

That was where the light was situated.

They entered the room.

Arnold's companion gave one contemptuous glance around at the objects fastened to the wall, and which were supposed to arouse a feeling of awe in the minds of the ignorant when they came to visit the sorceress.

Then he sat down.

In doing this he seemed to be careless enough, but it might be noticed that as he sat his back was toward the light, and he able to command the door, besides all that was in the room.

Then they waited.

Ben was interested.

True, his mind went now and then to the reward he was to receive for his work—the diamond ring that had sparkled upon the señorita's hand; but there was something beyond this that attracted him; Arnold possessed his share of curiosity, and was desirous of knowing the exact relationship existing between Graham and this lovely woman who sang so divinely.

After a while the señorita appeared upon the scene, standing in the doorway.

She was fully dressed, though her abundant hair hung

in braids down her back, as though she had not taken time to finish its arrangement.

She showed signs of excitement.

It looked as though the man she had employed must have accomplished his mission.

Slowly the señorita advanced.

Arnold advanced to meet her.

Upon his broad face was a grin of triumph, which he could not for the life of him repress.

"You'd given me up for to-night, I reckon, señorita," he said, nodding.

"Yes—it is near morning," she replied.

"Well, I've succeeded."

"And that is—David," in low tones, as she glanced half fearfully toward the man who still sat there with his head bowed.

"That's him. I ran across him by accident. He denied his identity at first, but agreed to come with me when I told him a pretty woman wanted to see him."

She pouted.

"He did not know who it was."

"Not he."

"And yet he came. Would he have done it, I wonder, if he had known?" she mused.

"Ask him," said Arnold, bluntly.

The advice seemed sensible.

"I will," she replied.

Then she turned toward the other.

It seemed as though she hesitated to advance, and was evidently making up her mind as to the course she should pursue.

Doubtless she had imagined this meeting scores of times in the past, but now that it had come, all pre-arranged plans left her.

Making a great effort, she began to advance slowly upon the man whom Arnold had just brought to the house.

Her liquid eyes were glued upon him in a way that spoke volumes in soul language.

He would not look up.

Perhaps he dared not.

Some innate feeling may have already told the man who this dark-skinned beauty, with the blue eyes, was, and fear had come upon him—at any rate he persisted in keeping his eyes fastened upon the floor at his feet.

She had now advanced until she was directly in front of the man.

The others watched them.

It was a striking tableau, but not near as effective as the one about to come.

"David!"

Her voice was musical and low. It pronounced this name with deepest feeling, and even a novice could tell she loved the owner of it.

He moved not, neither did he speak. The floor still had a wonderful attraction for him, as he kept his gaze fastened there.

"David, surely you know me?"

He shook his head negatively.

She became more eager.

"I am your own Mary—your wife. I have followed you, oh! so far, to show you the proofs of my innocence; to tell you I am, and have ever been, your own true wife.

David, look up, and let me hear you say you will listen. Look up, and assure me you do not hate—Heavens!"

He had obeyed.

She gazed upon his face with horror and loathing starting back and uttering loud cries.

"I have been deceived; this is a foul plot. That man is not David Graham!"

"What's that?" bellowed Arnold.

"You wretch, it is your fault! This is the other—the man who defied them all—Jesse James, the outlaw!"

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE HORNET'S NEST.

As was usually the case, the mention of that name caused consternation.

It had something of magic about it, for when men heard the sound they naturally understood that they had met a master.

The man who defied the authorities of State and country, and lived as boldly as did Jesse James, had one count at least in his favor—he might be a scoundrel, a murderer, cruel and relentless—people were divided on this score, but all agreed that he never knew the meaning of the word "fear."

The fortune-teller, who had entered and had taken a seat at one side of the room, leaned forward to gaze upon the face of this notorious man.

As for Ben Arnold, he held his breath.

The very thought that he had come near offering violence to Jesse James was, enough to make his very blood run cold.

"Impossible!" he gasped.

The señorita was the only one who seemed to be capable of speech.

"There can be no mistake on my part. Do you not think I would know my David? This is not he—it can only be the other!" she cried.

"But he went away with the rest."

"Then he has come back again. There, what is to hinder the man speaking for himself?"

"True," said the fortune-teller; "let us hear from his own lips who he is."

The party under discussion smiled.

He still had one hand on his revolver, and kept watch of Arnold.

Evidently he had no idea of allowing that worthy to get the drop on him, and, remembering their old quarrel, he believed Ben would be glad to do this same thing if he only possessed grit enough.

"The lady speaks truly—I am Jesse James."

"Confusion!" from Ben, as he fell back a foot.

"I was brought here partly against my will by that man yonder. I could not understand why he called me David Graham, but he declared a lady desired to see me, and I always make it a point to oblige the ladies."

The señorita murmured something.

She was gazing at this man's face as though his resemblance to one she loved caused her some deep uneasiness.

Perhaps there had flashed into her mind the terrible consequences should the tables ever be reversed, and David be taken for Jesse James.

Not far away, nearly half a score of human forms lay

in a ghastly row upon the ground—mute evidence of the terrible work done by Jesse James and his friends.

Such a thought as this was enough to cause the señorita's loving heart alarm.

"Strange, how singularly like you David is! Jesse James, men call you a bad man, but I know you have love in your heart for your dear ones at home. Will you promise me that if the chance ever comes to assist my David you will do it, because of his fatal resemblance?"

"I promise that, lady, readily enough, though I don't reckon the chance will ever come, for I leave this camp before morning, and California soon."

"What brought you back here? After what passed, I should have thought safety lay in flight."

It was the fortune-teller who spoke.

She admired the outlaw because she was a Southern woman, and he kept up the war, single-handed, against the hated Federal authorities.

This caused her to observe him with more than usual interest.

"What you say is true enough; but I had a little business in town, and I came. Danger never bothered me in the old days, with Quantrell. Arnold here can tell you that, and it don't go far with me in these times."

"Jesse James, you are a brave man. I am proud to shake hands with you."

It was just such prejudiced persons as this hating woman who kept alive in this man's black heart the idea that he was doing right.

Had he been hunted or shunned by all, many of his later crimes would never have been committed; but when a certain class of sympathizers with the Southern cause sympathized with him, and bade him go on with his work, it gave him nerve and courage, with such backing, to continue his evil course.

As he turned he faced Arnold.

"You and I may meet again, Ben. Take care that we do not wipe out the past when that time comes," he said, in a low but threatening tone.

Arnold opened his mouth to make a rejoinder.

It might have brought about an open quarrel even there, for Jesse James was a hot-tempered man, quick to take offense.

The man thought better of it, and the words he would have spoken died on his lips.

So Jesse James passed out of the house.

Ben Arnold had a double reason for being angry just then.

In the first place, he had failed to win the reward, and each time the señorita moved her hand the diamonds in the ring appeared to fairly dazzle his eyes.

Then, again, he had been humiliated in the presence of a woman.

No man likes that.

It makes him feel small, and always arouses a spirit of antagonism.

The situation even becomes more unbearable when the person against whom his hatred is leveled chances to be a man he fears with all his soul.

Thus Ben Arnold had no desire to remain and hear contemptuous remarks concerning his cowardice.

He, too, took a hasty departure.

In his mind he was puzzling over the presence of the outlaw in the camp.

Jesse James had surely gone away with the others after the battle.

Why had he returned?

Was it in a spirit of bravado, such as this man knew so well how to show, or had he forgotten some mission in the mining camp?

That was an open question.

The only thing they knew was that the man was undoubtedly on deck.

What should Arnold do?

What could he do?

His spirit of venom was more than ever inflamed against Jesse James, and he stood ready to do him a deadly injury—provided it could be accomplished in a manner that would not imperil his own safety.

That was his first consideration.

It stamped him a coward.

Brave men think of themselves last.

An idea entered Ben's head and gave him quite a feeling of exhilaration.

Yes, he would do it.

To tell this man and that the fact of Jesse James having returned to the mining camp would be to put them all on the *qui vive*.

Perhaps, when all eyes were on the lookout for him, the outlaw might be discovered, and either shot or captured.

In either event his fate would be sealed.

This idea appeared so pleasant to Arnold that he determined to lose no time in putting it into execution.

When he passed up the street his attention was attracted toward a bonfire, around which a crowd was assembled.

A stranger in Battle Mountain camp that night would have wondered what great affair could be on the tapis; but if his attention was called to the row of silent figures near by he would easily understand what had occurred.

Ben soon found himself among the men.

He lost no time in getting in his work.

To this one and that he spoke, and these in turn communicated the intelligence to others, until there were few, if any, who were not aware of the fact that Jesse James, the man who had defied the whole population of Battle Mountain, was back in the camp again.

There was something about the news that awed these rough men.

They could respect such desperate courage.

Somehow, no one spoke of the facts aloud, but a still hunt was organized.

In twos and threes small parties started out to look for the intruder.

If found he was to be summarily dealt with—captured, if possible, and shot down pitilessly should he make resistance.

Arnold saw all this.

To himself he chuckled over it, and began to indulge in hopes that success might come to his plans ere long.

Just then a hand touched his arm.

He was leaning against a cabin outside the plaza, yet within range of the lights.

As he turned his very blood ran cold, for he looked upon the face of Jesse James.

"I understand what you have done, Ben Arnold, and I owe you one more for it. Some day I'll pay the debt, but not now. Scowl if you dare again, and I'll press the trigger of the revolver I am pushing against your heart. Let me tell you here, you are a coward, and I'll keep an eye on you all the while. If you dare to show your hand again to-night something will go off near by, and Ben Arnold will be laid out with the rest of the boys over yonder. Understand?"

Ben did, and he nodded his head to signify it.

Any man could call him a coward who held a revolver to his heart.

He was not particular.

Jesse James vanished around the end of the cabin, but Arnold had been warned—he dared not raise the alarm.

CHAPTER IX.

JUDGE LYNCH.

Although Arnold dared not call out himself, and announce the presence of Jesse James near by, he had a lingering hope that some man among the miners would run across the Missouri outlaw and give the alarm.

Such a thing would have given him the keenest of pleasure.

Therefore, he listened with eagerness.

No such cry came to his ears.

The minutes passed on.

Arnold's state of mind was to be pitied.

He was furious enough to do almost anything, and yet feared lest that man should carry out his threat.

If the revolver of the outlaw sounded when bearing upon his form he knew he might as well give up the ghost, for Jesse James seldom missed his aim.

Some of the men were feeding the fires to keep them up—others stood near by, enjoying the cheerful warmth.

It was the fall of the year.

At such a time in the morning, half-way between midnight and dawn, the air was sharp, and a fire proved very comfortable.

Every man was armed.

It was hard to find a miner in those days, as well as in the times of '49, who was not.

While Ben stood thus undecided, suddenly loud shouts were heard.

They came from a quarter exactly opposite to the place where they stood.

The excitement grew apace.

Men called out, others whistled, and not a few fired revolvers in the air.

The whole camp was in a tumult.

A man came running past, and Arnold caught hold of his sleeve.

"What's the row?"

"They've got him!"

"Who?"

"Why, that devil, Jesse James."

"Sure?"

"Dead certain."

"Is he killed?"

"Not much; six men are holding him. He was making straight for the plaza when we ran plump into him, and before you could say Jack Robinson we had tumbled him over."

"Good! good!"

"They're leading him into the square yonder. Let go my arm, comrade."

"Where are you off to?"

"For a rope."

"Ha! they mean to hang him, then?"

"Of course—to the tree in the middle of the plaza. Go and take part in the fun."

With which the miner ran on, Arnold having released his grip.

Ben needed no second invitation.

He felt good all over; a warmth seemed to pass through his frame, just as though he had been told of a rich legacy.

Jesse James captured, and in the hands of these enraged miners.

Joy!

Ah! it would be an exhilarating sight to gaze upon him dangling in the air; he, the man whom Ben hated so thoroughly, and who had so coolly defied him on this very night.

The man started across the plaza.

He had not far to go.

Already a crowd was pushing into it from the other side—a jostling mob of bearded men, fierce in their demeanor, and with resolution marking their faces and speaking louder than words.

In their midst was a prisoner.

He had been disarmed, and numerous hands held him fast, though at times he struggled in a desperate fashion.

Then his lips would frame words, too, but if he spoke, his voice could not be heard above the chorus of jeers and laughter about him.

Ben had a glimpse of him.

"By the gods of war, they have got him—yes, that is Jesse James! Hurrah!" he ejaculated.

"You know him?" asked a miner at his side.

"Yes. I was with him as a guerrilla in the war, but since then we are foes."

"All right; stay near me. I shall want you as a witness, for I'm to be Judge Lynch," was the other's startling remark.

Ben was secretly glad.

He wanted to have a kick at the bound lion, and help Jesse James on toward his merited doom.

This he could do by swearing to his identity.

Besides it would be sweet for him to let the doomed outlaw know that he had a hand in the court that sent him to death—that he helped to draw upon the rope that choked him.

"I'll do it," said Ben, vigorously.

He joined the crowd.

They were none too careful in their manner of handling the prisoner, whose hair and beard were mussed considerably from his exertions to free himself.

Direct to the tree they took him.

There an impromptu court was formed.

The man who had announced himself to Ben Arnold as Judge Lynch mounted a barrel.

"Bring the prisoner before me!" he called out.

This was mere talk, as the party already stood in front, grasped by half a dozen men, looking wildly about him.

"Who accuses this man?"

A party stepped out.

"I do, your honor. I accuse him of being Jesse James, the notorious outlaw; the man who brought death to this camp to-night. Yonder lie his victims—our friends."

"Stand aside and let him see them."

The crowd separated, and through the lane could be seen the ghastly forms stretched out side by side, motionless in death.

It was a dreadful spectacle.

"You have heard the charge, prisoner; are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty."

"Do you deny that you are Jesse James?"

"I do, most vehemently."

"Ah! then we must have more proof. Where is Pepito, the Mexican?"

"Here."

A figure advanced.

It was the gambler with whom Jesse James had played, and whom he had shot down and apparently killed; but the Mexican still lived, to curse him now.

He was covered with blood and weak, but his yellow face looked as vindictive as that of a fiend from Hades.

"Pepito, would you remember the man with whom you played this night—the man who shot you, and blew Buckram's brains out?" asked Judge Lynch, quickly.

"Si, señor, in life or death I would swear to him; I shall never forget him."

"Do you see him present?"

"I do."

"Point him out."

The Mexican's long, bony finger, trembling with the weakness consequent upon the loss of so much blood from his wound, swung around until it rested upon the prisoner's breast.

"*Caramba!* that is the man, señor."

"It is a lie!" grated the prisoner; "I never even saw the yellow hound before!"

Pepito drew his knife with a snarl, and would have sprung upon the helpless man, but he was hustled away by men who would not stand by and see a cowardly deed done.

"Ben Arnold!"

"On deck!"

"You knew Jesse James in days gone by?"

"I fought with him under Quantrell."

"He is no friend of yours?"

"We hate each other like the Kilkenny cats."

"Would you know him?"

"I am certain of it."

"Look well at this man—tell us, is he Jesse James, the outlaw, or not?"

Arnold gazed at the prisoner.

"That is Jesse James," he declared.

"Another lie!" shouted the man.

"Are you ready to swear to his identity?"

"I am."

"That settles it. Gentlemen, we have proven that the prisoner is Jesse James, and that he is the man responsible for the terrible calamity that has fallen on Battle Mountain camp this night. I pronounce him guilty. Sentence him at your will. What is your pleasure, gentlemen?"

They did not hesitate.

"Hang him!"

"Up with the Missouri wildcat!"

"No quarter!"

"Death to the assassin!"

In the midst of the clamor the prisoner had become remarkably cool.

He wrenched one hand loose and held it up to quiet the clamor while he spoke.

Some who believed in fair play would have harkened, but others kept up a clatter on purpose to drown his voice.

In the midst of the tumult the man who had gone for a rope brought it up.

The arm of the prisoner was seized again, and, with a dexterous turn of some cord, fastened to the other behind his back.

Every man seemed to desire to have a hand in the affair.

It would be something to boast of in future years—having been concerned in the execution of so notorious a man as Jesse James.

There were other reasons why they were anxious to help in the lynching of the Missouri desperado—friends had gone down on this bloody night before the revolvers of his gang, and no one had as yet paid for it.

So there would be no lack of recruits when it came to drawing on the rope.

The scene was a striking one.

When they had thrown the rope over a convenient limb the noose dangled in front of the prisoner's face.

He tried to prevent their placing it over his head, but was next to helpless in their hands.

When he would have spoken, his words were drowned in the roar that went up.

Plainly they meant to give him no show, and did not care to hear him speak, perhaps believing he only desired to curse them.

The judge himself placed the noose over the neck of the condemned, holding on to the rope above, so they could not draw until he gave the signal, for he was possessed of an exalted idea of his office, and desired to get all the dramatic spirit out of it possible.

Just as he was about to give the looked-for wave of the official hand, which was to usher a condemned soul into eternity, there was a woman's shriek, and through the crowd came the señorita—her hair flying, and men making way for her mutely.

"You shall not murder him—this man is my husband, David Graham!" she cried aloud.

CHAPTER X.

"HE STANDS RIGHT HERE."

These words of the señorita were plainly heard by all present.

Men remembered her as the singer who had charmed them in the concert saloon, and in California mines a woman of modesty and refinement always commanded respect.

Hence, upon sight of her, silence such as the prisoner could not command with his most earnest entreaties, fell upon the assemblage.

Rough men though they were, they gave this woman a chance to speak.

Her words fell upon deaf ears, however, so far as mercy was concerned.

Why not?

They had seen Jesse James—that is, most of them had—when he defied the whole gambling element of the camp not many hours before, and in this man they recognized him.

Besides he had surely been identified by several of their number, and in a way that proved the fact beyond all doubt.

The lady must be mistaken.

Even if she were not, this proved nothing.

Suppose the man she claimed as her husband was known to her as David Graham, to the world at large he had another name.

The silence grew oppressive.

It did not argue any good for the man.

Scowls were cast at him, as though the miners hated him more than ever because he had deceived such a lovely woman.

Judge Lynch cleared his throat.

He had a difficult task to perform, but he went at it hammer and tongs.

"Madam, it gives me pain to refuse you any favor, but I am afraid what you ask is out of the question," he said.

"You will not murder him—you dare not take his life," she flashed.

"Dare not hardly covers the case, madam. This community is a court unto itself. This man has been legally tried; he has been caught almost red-handed near the scenes of his crimes. Twenty persons will swear to his identity; he has been convicted, and must suffer the penalty."

"I beg of you—I entreat you to spare him."

"Again I say it grieves me to refuse. All I can do is to put it to the court to decide. Men, all in favor of allowing this man Jesse James to live cry out ay."

Intense silence followed.

The prisoner had not a friend present.

"Those in favor of his death, answer."

A thunder of exclamations almost shook the ground, and proved how unanimous the mob seemed to be in this matter.

The señorita gave a little shriek, and covered her eyes with her hands.

It was awful to see those savage faces pressing around her, thirsting for the blood of the man she loved.

Had they been veritable wolves of the desert they could not have seemed more ferocious.

"Will nothing move you?" she cried.

"Madam, why prolong a painful scene. The boys have decided and his fate is sealed. No mortal power can save him," said the judge.

At this the señorita became hysterical.

She threw her arms around the prisoner and kissed him passionately.

The judge himself had no idea of allowing a weak man to defy his authority.

Much as he disliked to use force, he must certainly do it.

So he made a motion to a couple of men who could be looked upon as his officers.

They knew what he meant.

Stepping forward they gently but firmly laid their hands upon the woman.

"Come, you must leave him," they said.

"No, no, if you murder him, you kill me. He is my husband, my all. It is some cruel mistake—you will regret it when too late."

"Come."

"I will not."

But she did.

They firmly released her clutch, and the prisoner, seeing how gentle they were, could only groan.

It looked as though his time had come.

Shrieking and struggling the poor señorita was drawn back.

Men grasped the rope.

They were eager to pull, but restrained themselves, for fear lest the poor creature might by some chance see the man dangling.

This was rare consideration.

By this time the crowd had closed in, so that there was a solid phalanx around the barrel on which stood the judge.

He waved his hand.

Silence came upon the throng again.

"Gentlemen, the hour of vengeance has arrived, and this man with all his sins on his head must be ushered into eternity. When I give the proper signal, every man do his duty."

"Ay, ay," came in deep-throated response.

Willing hands had grasped the rope again, and those who could lay hold prepared to pull.

The doomed man would be drawn up in a second's time.

He noticed the opportunity, and though his face showed no signs of fear, he seized upon this last chance to sway the mob.

"Hold one minute, comrades. Will you give a fellow-human no chance for defense? You call this a court of justice? Can justice be blinded by prejudice? In no court is a man condemned without a hearing. I can prove my innocence; hang me, and every man of you becomes a murderer. Will you hear me?"

A few called out in the affirmative, but their voices were drowned in the angry roar of the mob, which, baffled of its expected prey thus far, would brook no further delay.

They wanted the scene closed, and their bloodthirsty desires could only be satisfied by seeing the enemy dangling from the tree.

"Up with him!"

"No more nonsense!"

"Their blood cries out against him."

"Vengeance! vengeance!"

"Give the signal!"

Judge Lynch was personally in favor of allowing the condemned his little say before running him up, but against such strong sentiment he was almost powerless.

There was but one thing to do.

He must give the signal.

Before doing so he spoke again.

"Boys, we have done our duty in this affair, but we don't want to make a mistake. What he would say amounts to nothing, for the man who would cut a throat would not hesitate to lie; but if there is a man present who believes we have made a mistake in this affair, let him speak now, or forever hold his peace."

Silence!

"No one answers—we will proceed."

"Hold on, judge!" called out a voice.

"Well?"

"The man is innocent of what you accuse him."

All eyes were turned toward the speaker.

"You dare say this?" cried the judge.

"Because I can prove it. The man you want is Jesse James, and that ain't him."

"Men have sworn to it."

"Men can lie, judge. Let that man go free. I am the party you want. Now, take Jesse James if you dare—he stands right here!"

CHAPTER XI.

FIFTY TO ONE.

It was a bold act.

A man like Jesse James was not apt to imperil his neck for the sake of one whom some freak of fortune had caused to resemble him in form and features, unless he had a good reason for it, and there was also a fair chance of escape.

His daring words almost paralyzed the crowd.

They could not comprehend how a man could be reckless enough to stand there and defy them all.

True, he was armed.

Jesse James never went without his revolvers, and when they spoke something happened.

At the same time it seemed so much like suicide to brave their anger, with the noose so near at hand, that for a moment or so not a man among them all could move a hand.

Nor did they give tongue.

A deadly silence fell upon the crowd. The citizens of Battle Mountain camp had met with a surprise that acted like a bucket of icy water thrown down their backs.

Jesse James was no fool.

He had not the least idea of sacrificing himself for this apparent stranger.

Before taking this seemingly fatal step, he had made sure of one thing.

This was that the line of retreat was open.

As he stood there the crowd faced him—behind was an open spot, and some shanties, offering him a way to conduct his retreat.

The light of the torches flared fitfully, but illuminated the scene fairly well.

Every eye was glued upon the desperado who stood there calmly, his arms outstretched, and the weapons he held wandering back and forth as though seeking a victim.

"Gentlemen, I pronounce that man innocent. He chances to resemble Jesse James, and it is because of that I risk my life here and now; but he never had anything to do with me or my business. Hang him and you do murder—dy'e hear, hounds? Now, if you want something to have a little fun with, tackle me."

Again they gasped in amazement.

Such a bearing as this they had never before seen in the gold mines.

Presently they would recover.

The reaction would be severe.

Fifty to one could not long be kept in check, and when the critical moment came there would be a swarming of men about that spot, as though a hive of human bees had given up its contents.

The judge was the first to recover.

"Does any one recognize this man, or is he a crazy fool?" he called out.

A dozen answered.

"It's Jesse James, without a doubt—just like him to dare the whole town."

"Then down with him. One man can't run the camp of Battle Mountain!" roared the judge.

"Suppose you come first."

As the desperado thus spoke he brought one of his weapons to bear upon the presiding officer.

Fully expecting that the revolver was about to sound his death-knell, Judge Lynch, forgetting all his official dignity, rolled back off his stand, head over heels, upsetting the barrel, and creating general confusion.

The incident was enough, however, to break up the state of apathy that had existed.

A rush was made toward the spot where the desperado had stood.

He was there no longer.

Taking advantage of the momentary excitement, he had leaped behind the nearest cabin.

Without waiting a second, he passed along and reached a second house.

Into this he sprang, the door being open, a fact he was cognizant of before making this attempt to save an innocent man.

No one had seen him enter—at least this was his belief.

He banked a great deal on this fact, and if it were back on him he would probably have a pretty hot time of it.

As soon as he leaped through the doorway, he seized the door and shut it.

At this instant a whirlwind of shouts rent the air within—the mob of miners had turned their attention from the floundering judge to the man who had so coolly defied them, only to discover that he was *non est*.

Of course the search would begin.

Excited squads or men rushed hither and yon, bearing torches, and carrying all manner of deadly weapons ready to annihilate the bold invader of the camp if he could be found.

Naturally they supposed he was bent on making his escape from the camp as speedily as possible, and hence would look for him everywhere but in the spot where he had hidden.

He kept on the watch.

The prisoner was soon the only person left on the scene of action.

All through the camp could be heard the shouts of excited miners.

Every man met with was faced by a heavy revolver and made to give an account of himself.

Such a night Battle Mountain camp had never known before, and if the object of Jesse James had been

create excitement, he had certainly succeeded in accomplishing it.

He kept watch and ward.

When the fact became assured that the coast was clear, he opened the door and slipped out.

CHAPTER XII.

BACK TO THE TIGER'S DEN.

Fires had been built in a dozen places.

The racket had increased rather than diminished.

It would go hard with the cause of all this disturbance if they laid hands on him.

He could expect no mercy.

Jesse James asked none.

He pulled his hat down over his face, and kept away from the fires.

Dodging about in the shadows he seemed to be looking for some one.

"The more I think of it the more I believe it was that man, and why should he be here if not to look for me? He carries papers I want, curse him for a sneak of a detective. I believe he must have tracked us here."

While muttering to himself in this way, the man from Missouri kept watch.

No one passed him by that he did not peer eagerly at.

"They all walk too straight; I know his step. He had a broken leg once, and I reckon I had something to do with that. Anyhow, he limps a little with the left leg. Yes, I am almost ready to swear it's Peleg Smith. The idea crept into my mind, and it grew until I determined to find out the truth."

He ceased muttering.

Another man approached.

"Death and furies! it's my man!" he hissed, almost below his breath.

The person approaching certainly did have a game left leg, for he limped a little.

Straight on he came.

If he kept this course he would undoubtedly pass close by the spot where the desperado crouched like a huge man-spider, ready to fly out upon his prey.

The man seemed to suspect no danger.

He came straight on.

A few more seconds would tell the story, and Jesse James braced himself for the ordeal.

Still forward came his intended victim.

Presently the man from Missouri hurled his weight upon the other.

His attack was without warning.

The desperado being a man of more than ordinary weight, the violence of his assault can easily be estimated.

It would seem that a man must go over like a ten-pin when squarely struck by the ball bowled against it.

Such a thing did not happen in this case, however. The attacked individual seemed to suddenly brace himself like a rock.

Jesse James was astonished.

He found himself thus suddenly embracing what seemed to be a human post.

With all the desperate strength of his body he wrestled with the man he had assaulted, endeavoring by every trick known to him to force the other off his feet.

Thus they swayed like two giant oaks in the fury of a tempest, bending this way and that but never breaking.

One thing was strange.

The attacked man did not cry out.

It was not because his assailant had him by the throat, for that was not so.

Why, then, should he keep silent when a shout would bring a score of brawny miners to his assistance and overwhelm the outlaw?

Was it a point of honor?

He guessed the identity of his assailant, and scorned to call for aid against the man he had tracked so far.

Jesse James did not consider this point.

He simply knew that he had hold of his hated foe, and that his plan for suddenly overwhelming the other had failed.

Every muscle in his whole powerful body was brought into play.

How those two writhed and twisted!

Panting hard with their exertions, they came to a pause, as though by mutual consent, and still retaining their savage clutch, breathed into each other's face.

Eye glared to eye.

The fires burning throughout the camp had dissipated the darkness everywhere to a certain extent, so that those orbs, with their power intensified by hate, could see much.

"You villain, I've found you!" gritted the outlaw.

"You contemptible cur! you murderer of unarmed men! you thief! I have found you at last!" answered Peleg Smith, not one whit daunted by the fact that the man with whom he contended was the terrible Jesse James.

One thing was marked.

The outlaw almost foamed with rage, while the detective remained comparatively cool, as though it had always been his business to school himself against ebullitions of temper.

He evidently knew full well that the advantage was with the man who restrained himself, and kept his brain clear.

Although equally matched, to all appearances, Smith only held his own against the desperate onslaught of the outlaw because of his exceeding coolness, and the attitude he struck when bracing himself against the other's efforts.

The very leg which had been broken by his past work, now stood a stumbling-block in the road to success, for the outlaw could no more move his opponent when that limb was set, than if it was a man of stone against whom he thus furiously contended.

Although Peleg Smith scorned to call for assistance in capturing the Missouri desperado and train robber, help came unsolicited.

While men were moving about the streets of the mining town in such an excited way, it was impossible for such a vigorous battle to continue long without drawing attention.

Several men came running up.

They guessed the true state of affairs at once, and raised a loud shout.

"Here he is—this way—this way. We've found Jesse James!"

When these cries went ringing out over the camp of

Battle Mountain, it can be set down as certain that they created intense excitement. The uproar grew greater in volume, until it seemed as though Bedlam had certainly broken loose.

Jesse James came to a conclusion.

He realized that he was foiled for the present in his desire for revenge.

He must vamoose the ranch, and the sooner this was done, the better for his health.

It was one thing to decide upon this fact, and quite another to accomplish it.

True, he could release his clutch upon the detective, but that was only half the battle, since Peleg Smith held on with the tenacity of a bull dog. He could not be shaken off.

Jesse James no longer endeavored to down his enemy. The case was altered, and he now simply tried to extricate himself from the difficulty into which his inconsiderate haste and desire for revenge had thrown him.

Now his struggles took on a new phase.

Hitherto they had been the result of sudden fury, but now it was baffled rage and grim despair that incited him to frenzy.

Still he failed.

No human power could exceed the determination with which that hunter of men maintained his clutch upon the outlaw.

"You are mine, Jesse James—mine!" he gasped, while the other twisted and squirmed in vain.

With every fleeting second his chances grew more beautifully less, since men were arriving upon the scene continually, and already a cordon of half a dozen surrounded the foes, who were whirling about in each other's embrace.

Perhaps a vision fleeted before the outlaw's mental sight—of a man dangling from a tree with a rope around his neck.

Such would be his fate in ten minutes should he fall into the hands of these men.

No wonder he fought as never man fought before to free himself from that embrace.

By this time the miners were beginning to show an aggressive front.

They comprehended the status of the fight, and were, of course, one and all against the desperado, whom they looked upon as mortal foe.

More than one of them had a weapon in his hand, but they were deterred from making use of these by the fact that it was uncertain whether a bullet would strike the head of a friend or foe, owing to the evolutions of the wrestlers.

Still there was at least one man present who could not keep his fingers out of the pie.

A fight was a picnic to him.

There must surely have been Irish blood in his veins.

He carried quite a stout cudgel, which he was whirling in the air in a manner very suggestive of a desire to join in the fray.

Presently the opportunity for which he had been looking arrived—at least he was of the opinion that it had, and that he could now join in the little circus.

The cudgel was raised.

It started to cut the air.

The outlaw was on the lookout and saw his danger. He ducked his head.

Although the man who wielded the club realized that his blow must be a failure, he had already gone too far. Whack!

Good Heavens! it was upon the cranium of the detective that the blow fell.

He released his clutch and fell over.

If not killed he was certainly stunned.

Jesse James had found his release in a peculiar way indeed.

Thus it is that often our best intentions are only an opportunity for the enemy to mount higher.

The outlaw had already turned to dash through the line of men and make good his escape, when a sudden thought seemed to strike him.

He bent down over the fallen man.

Like lightning he tore open coat and vest, and plunged his hand within the latter, where his practiced touch had betrayed the presence of papers.

These he snatched from their hiding-place, and with them clutched in his hand sprang erect.

He had succeeded after all.

A strange combination of circumstances had allowed him to triumph, even after the game seemed in the other's hands.

One thing remained.

Could he make his escape?

The papers were thrust away in a pocket of the loose blouse he wore.

Just then some one opened the ball, and a bullet cut a hole through the crown of his hat.

The scrimmage was on.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LEAGUE OF SIX.

By this time the desperado from Missouri had snatched a couple of revolvers from their resting place and was making things fairly hum around that section.

He opened on the crowd that barred his progress, and as was customary with him when acting under such peculiar conditions, confined his attention to one particular point.

Thus he immediately made an opening.

Men dropped or fell back before the deadly blaze of those heated revolvers.

With every report, the outlaw gave a shout and advanced.

Other shots were fired.

These were sent at him, but the devil's own luck seemed to hang over the man, who on this night had braved the whole camp, and stirred it up as Battle Mountain had never before been aroused by any circumstances.

He was wounded, yes, but not in a manner to count, and in all probability the man would not know it until afterward, when he came to look himself over.

A gap was opened.

Through this he sprang.

After clearing the line, he whirled around so that his face might still be toward the foe.

Nor did his revolvers cease their terrible explosion.

if he had put some little distance between himself and his foes.

Then it was over.

He vanished.

The miners made a rush, recovering from their sudden stupor.

Too late!

They reached the spot where the dare-devil had stood, but saw him not.

A laugh came from the darkness beyond.

"Remember Jesse James!" called a taunting voice.

"Fire!" shouted an angry miner.

Then weapons began to sound, as the men sent a whirlwind of leaden messengers in the direction whence the voice had come.

Some believed it was from the right, others from the left, and consequently the amount of territory covered by the bullets was immense.

Was there any result?

Did chance favor them?

All was silent after the discharge, save the excited cries of men plunging through the camp, and heading for this spot.

Torches were procured.

By the aid of these they discovered blood spots on the rocks, and immediately the idea sprang into existence that the outlaw had been severely wounded.

They started on the trail.

The outlaw could not have more completely disappeared if the earth had opened and swallowed him.

After a long hunt, most of the miners were for giving up the game.

This virtually meant abandoning the whole business out and out; at least Peleg Smith looked at it in that way.

He was determined to keep up the pursuit, even if he had to go it alone.

There were several men present whom he believed he could depend on.

He sounded them.

In this manner he found five who declared their willingness to go through fire and water with him, in order to kill the man from Missouri.

Thus they made a party of six.

Peleg Smith found, as he suspected, that each of these men had some personal grievance against Jesse James.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT THE RED DOG TAVERN.

At the first peep of dawn the pursuit was begun.

It had been decided that the best plan would be for five to go ahead, while the others crept along in the rear at far away.

If the wounded outlaw lay in some clump of bushes, might fire upon the man who led, but those following could be warned.

True, this was rough on the leader, since the chances were five to one that he would get a chunk of lead somewhere about his person.

This might be expected when the nature of the man they were fighting was taken into consideration.

They even looked for it.

In order to equalize this matter, they had drawn lots, and arranged who was to have the lead each successive hour.

It was a lottery.

When the hostile battery opened ahead, as they expected it would, the man on the trail must go down, but he might have the satisfaction of knowing that his comrades would avenge him.

Thus they struggled on.

The trail had become harder to follow.

Jesse James must have discovered that he was wounded, and stopped to bandage his cuts.

Of this they found positive evidence in a certain spot where a remnant of a blood-stained handkerchief met their gaze.

From this point on there were a few blood stains, and the men found greater difficulty in making sure they were on the trail.

At length, to their satisfaction, the man had reached the regular trail leading to Blue Blazes Bar, and followed it up.

They made sure of this.

Once in a while a careful examination was made, and a spot of blood discovered.

This satisfied them.

True, some other wounded person might have passed this way, but then such a thing was only possible, not probable.

The entire morning was consumed.

Toward noon they drew near the Bar.

Feather River gleamed below them, and the red shirts of miners could be seen as the men worked away with shovel and cradle, gathering the golden sand from the bed of the river.

They never dreamed that twenty-one years later an enterprising company would turn Feather River from its course, and with machinery scoop up millions from the bed during the short months of the dry season.

That has only recently been done.

That their man had gone on down the mountain trail into the mining town was evident, for at the time they looked upon the Bar, there were traces of blood seen on the rocks.

Down they went.

Men were moving about.

They attracted little attention, for miners drifted from one camp to another daily.

Gamblers there were in every camp.

These were about the only men who wore "biled" shirts in the mines, save when an Eastern speculator came into town.

Into camp went the six avengers.

They were all miners, even Peleg Smith, the detective, having been digging for gold while searching the country for Jesse James.

Cautious inquiries were made, each man starting out on his own hook.

It was arranged that they were to meet at a certain time.

When two hours had passed they came together at the Red Dog Tavern, the point from whence they had started out.

Peleg Smith looked at each man as he came in, and saw expressions of disgust stamped upon their features.

Such a look could mean but one thing.

Failure!

They tried to analyze his features, but this was beyond their powers.

He always wore a mask over his feelings, and the countenance of the sphinx could not be more impenetrable than that of Peleg Smith.

One by one he questioned them.

"What luck, Andy?"

"None at all," was the surly response.

"How about you, Colton?"

A negative shake.

"Ben?"

The man addressed growled.

"Jack, surely you struck a trail."

"Hanged if the earth ain't opened and swallowed the pesky guerrilla. Them James boys always had the reputation for being onnatural."

"Well, Caleb, report."

"Got nothin' to say, boss."

"Ah! the whole five of you sent out in different directions, and no result. Nobody has seen a wounded man limp into camp?"

"Nary a one."

"Now I was left to guard home base and ask questions of any one who came in."

"Did you discover anything, Peleg?"

"I never left the Red Dog all the time, and half the afternoon gone."

"Then we're left flat on the start."

"Hold on."

"Eh? what now?"

"I haven't said I made a failure of it."

Five faces brightened up.

As many pair of eyes were glued upon the sphinx-like face of the detective.

He sat there nonchalantly in his chair, and looked so peaceful that one would not believe he cared whether school kept or not.

His eyes were half shut.

"Boys, draw up a little closer. You know they say walls have ears sometimes, and what I am about to say I don't care to have every one hear."

Did they obey. Well, they crowded him so close that he had to beg for a little room.

"Easy now. I'll tell you what I've discovered sitting here at ease in the Red Dog while you were scampering all over town."

"I always did believe the hunting was just as good in the home lot as miles away."

"I've found out positively that our man, Jesse James, came into this camp early this morning, and that, without question he is still here."

"Then why didn't we run across him?"

"Or some fellow who had seen him?"

"It's deuced strange."

"Not at all. The miners were all at work when he came in, and as he has been asleep ever since they have had no chance of meeting him."

"Asleep! Do you know where, Peleg?"

"I do."

"Tell us."

"Bend your heads. Jesse James is at this very minute under the same roof as we are."

They uttered low exclamations of surprise, and looked around them as though half-expecting to see the bearded face of the man from Missouri over their shoulders.

"Peleg, are you sure?" asked one.

"As certain as that I see you, Ben."

The astonishing nature of this information seemed to rattle the men who were so earnestly engaged in hunting the detective.

They again looked at each other, as though hardly able to comprehend the truth.

"This is astonishing news," said one.

"Yes, if certain."

"Don't doubt it," quietly remarked the detective; "I have looked upon him."

This created another sensation.

Their respect for Peleg Smith was on the increase. He seemed to be a wonderful man, and well worthy of being pitted against such a clever rascal as Jesse James.

"Tell us about it."

"There is little to tell. You know I am in disguise as a miner, and the fellow was not apt to know me if we met."

"After you had all gone out, I hardly knew what to do with myself, and in a spirit of idle curiosity, began questioning our genial boniface who runs the Red Dog."

"Judge of my surprise, when by his answers, I became impressed with the idea that we had the very man we sought under the same roof at that moment."

"He had a room on the second floor, and as I engaged one also, I easily discovered that his apartment occupied the corner."

"You see how easy it was."

"All I had to do was to go upstairs a little later and make a mistake in the room. See?"

They nodded their heads eagerly, deeply interested in his recital.

"Go on, Peleg."

"I knew none of the doors had locks on them, because I taken the trouble to examine beforehand, and hence, all I had to do was to pretend to be half drunk."

"In this condition I staggered up against his door, and of course pushed it open."

"Yes, yes."

"The room was light enough for me to see, although he had the curtain drawn. As I stood inside muttering brokenly in a stupified way, a man sat upon the bed covered me with a long revolver. It was him—Jesse James!"

CHAPTER XV.

A DEEP-LAID SCHEME.

The five listeners were spellbound.

Their eyes were fastened upon the face of the narrator, as though they could not afford to lose a single word of his tale.

Face to face with Jesse James in a small room, and covered by the revolver of the notorious desperado—was a situation that was enough to appall one.

How had Peleg come out of the game?

They were anxious to hear the rest, but the detective did not seem to worry himself.

He knew what he was about, and that there was plenty of time.

"Go on."
 "What did he say?"
 "What did you do?"
 "Yes, tell us all."
 Peleg Smith yawned.
 "Well, you see, being a drunken man, I did not show the least sign of fear when I found myself covered with the revolver."
 "I laughed, in a stupid sort of way, and pretended to take it all as a joke, saying:
 "'Shay, ole feller, what yer doin' in my bed? 'Tain't fair, ye know, ter occupy more'n half on it. Ain't ye bin' ter make room?'"
 "He seemed to grasp the situation, and answered as quick as you please:
 "'See here, old man, you've made a mistake in the room. Move on!'"
 "I began to beg his pardon, as a good-natured, drunken fool might, but he scowled, and told me to take myself off, which I did."
 "Well done, Peleg."
 "So, the door opens to the touch, eh?"
 "No, it did."
 "What now?"
 "Well, as I staggered down the hall, I could hear him dragging some piece of furniture against the door to secure it."
 "The deuce!"
 "If we want to get at him, it must be by some other road."
 "The window, for instance."
 "Yes."
 "Of course there is one in his room?"
 "Two; it's on the corner, you know."
 "Can we go to work now?"
 "Better lay off a while, and wait for night. The darkness is better fitted for work like that," said the detective, calmly.
 They were not particularly shrewd men, but they saw the wisdom of his policy.
 A little delay could not hurt them, and it might be a means of doing much good.
 All of them nodded.
 "Just so. You know best, Peleg."
 "We're willing to follow your lead, Peleg."
 "And go it blind, even."
 These expressions told that the men placed implicit confidence in their leader.
 Smith smiled.
 It flattered him to have men follow him with such faith in his powers.
 At the same time, he was not fool enough to think he had altered the case a particle.
 The man opposed to them had a great force back of him. As yet he had never been outwitted by the many detectives sent out after him.
 True, in the year '69, Jesse James had not reached the height of his notoriety, but he had already made a name for himself that was feared from one end of the country to the other.
 Honest men shivered when they heard it mentioned, and criminals became bolder as they read of his daring success at robbing trains and banks on the soil of old Missouri.

The six men now entered into a consultation regarding the best means to be employed in order to gain their end.

Peleg Smith was a great organizer.

Here suggestions were made by one and all.

He never felt above receiving hints from any source, and applying them.

In this manner he was enabled to group the facts, and make a strong case.

The plan of campaign was soon agreed upon, and each man had his part.

During the interim that must elapse before darkness fell they would keep watch and ward over the tavern, to make sure their man did not leave it, and vanish from view, before the thunderbolt could fall which they were forging.

It did not concern them as to who went into the house, but every one leaving it must pass under their supervision.

On his person Peleg Smith carried a little agent that would reduce a strong man to the helpless state of an infant if properly applied.

Chloroform?

Not exactly, but another drug which was even more dangerous in the hands of a reckless man.

This combination is in the form of a powder, so fine that it is like mere dust.

Blown through a keyhole or other small aperture, by means of a little tube, it fills a room with a peculiar odor, not at all offensive.

A person would succumb to its influence in from one to five minutes.

At last darkness began to settle like a pall upon the mining camp.

As the hills arose on either side, it was earlier in coming than would have been the case had the diggings been situated on higher ground.

Lights flashed into existence.

When night settled down the camp awoke.

Strains of music sounded.

Voices trolled songs, or shouted words of greeting, while lights flashed from every saloon in town.

Men drifted from one scene to another, the various dens or halls being all well filled.

All this came about so suddenly that it seemed as though some wizard must have flashed his magic wand over the camp, causing the many lights to pierce the darkness.

The time had come.

Peleg Smith held a last consultation with the men who were to back him up.

All seemed arranged.

Two of them were to take places in the hall, so that they could shoot Jesse James down in case he opened his door.

That this latter was still secured on the other side the detective knew, for he had gone quietly along and pushed against it himself.

Another man was stationed below, ready to run to the assistance of either party, according to the prospect of his being needed.

Smith took the others.

He would in all probability make use of them around the corner.

Giving them a low order, he sent them off, remaining himself long enough to insert a charge of the strange powder in the little blow-gun or tube some six inches long, which he carried, and which was slender enough to fit a small keyhole.

All was now ready.

To business.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW IT WORKED.

When the detective turned the corner of the house he found himself in darkness.

No ray of light reached this point, although, of course, the gloom was not quite so intense as it would have been had there been no illumination near at hand.

Peleg Smith could see no one.

Were his men on hand?

He gave a faint whistle, not unlike the chirp of a little bird among the eaves of the house.

It was answered.

In another moment Peleg had reached the side of his two men.

These worthies were Andy and Ben.

He had picked them out as being the best of the five to back him up.

"Did you find the ladder?" he whispered.

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"Under the window."

"You didn't make a noise?"

"Not a bit of it—still as mice," said Ben.

"Church mice at that," echoed Andy, in the same sibilant whisper.

Peleg was satisfied.

He knew that thus far the game favored him, and it was with a peculiar feeling of nervous eagerness that he led the way over to where the ladder stood.

This he found by groping for it.

"Are you sure this is the window—it is so confounded dark I'm rather mixed?" he asked.

"Dead certain," said Andy.

"Cock sure, captain," from Ben.

Such decided assurance settled it—besides, Peleg did not remember of seeing any other window near this one around the corner, so it did not seem possible a mistake could occur.

Peleg Smith knew more in half an hour than he did just then.

All was now ready for the finishing touches.

Only Peleg himself could deliver these.

He felt of the ladder.

It must be secure, for any movement on the part of the vehicle by means of which he was to mount, would probably arouse his intended victim and spoil the play.

Everything seemed all right.

Peleg had no fault to find.

He brought his head close to those of his two assistants, and in low but distinct tones gave his last orders concerning their movements.

A code of signals had already been arranged, and they knew what a certain sound would mean to them.

Having completed his arrangements, Peleg at once began to ascend the ladder.

This was a rudely-made affair.

What it had ever been used for originally none of the could even conjecture, nor did they try.

Its location had been carefully marked in the daytime, so there would be no trouble in laying hands on it during the darkness.

As has been seen, Ben and Andy had secured it in the easiest manner possible.

Although so rudely made, it appeared to be in a serviceable condition.

Peleg detected nothing about it to serve as a warning that it would give way under his weight, or play him a trick; and yet these rudely-constructed and home-made affairs are not always to be trusted, as they have been known to play one false just at the critical moment when most dependence is placed upon them.

He mounted step by step.

The tavern was not a high structure, and was one of the few two-story buildings in the camp.

Perhaps the windows of the second story were some ten feet or even eleven from the ground, although the floor was only nine.

The short ladder reached just to the window.

If it had been made as a movable stairs to allow lodgers free access to the upper story before stationary stairs were built inside the house, it could not have filled the bill better.

The distance being so short, Peleg had only mounted about five rounds when his head came on a level with the window.

Now came an open question.

What was the condition of the window?

Would he find it tightly closed or partly open?

As Jesse James had the door of his room secured, would smother if the window should also be hermetically sealed.

The detective reached out his left hand, steadying himself meanwhile with his knee, as he carefully held the little tube in his other hand.

His fingers touched glass.

It seemed as though the window was shut.

He allowed his hand to travel downward.

Ah! an electric thrill passed through his frame.

Luck! why, this was a splendid streak of it.

He could hardly keep from chuckling.

The window was open a few inches to admit fresh air; a block seemed to hold it up.

What could suit him better?

Why, it was as though the affair was arranged to satisfy his most exacting demands.

All he had to do now was to insert the little tube, deliver a smart blow, and then wait for a certain amount of time to pass by.

The wonderful powder would do the rest.

There was no use of delaying, since fortune had been kindly given him the game.

He cautiously ascended another step.

Now his face was near the opening; he even pressed against the sash.

Gently he inserted the tube.

All seemed well.

The little blow gun reached his lips.

Peleg drew in a good breath first, the better to expel the powder in a cloud.

He smiled.

This must surely settle the hash of the bold Missouri outlaw; Jesse James, caught in a trap, would meet his fate.

Then, with a puff, he expelled the powder from the little tube.

The thing was done.

He listened a second to learn if the slight sound had roused the outlaw.

Some one turned over on the bed; there was a grunt, and then came regular breathing again.

That settled it.

Jesse James slept on.

He was sleeping to his doom.

Thrilled with exultation over the success of his little scheme, Peleg Smith crept down the ladder.

He found his men below.

They were eager for news.

"Well?" demanded Ben.

"Is it done?" echoed Andy.

Peleg chuckled.

"All serene. Remain here. If any one tries to climb out of the window, down him."

"We will."

"You bet."

"I am going where it is light, to see when our ten minutes are up."

"Good."

"We'll keep guard, captain."

So the detective hurried around the corner, and entered the saloon, where a score or two of men were lounging, talking over the exciting news that had come from the diggings at Battle Mountain during the night.

Peleg consulted his watch.

He was waiting for time to pass.

When the ten minutes had expired he would return to his work.

They were like so many hours to him, because of his condition.

Was the drug working?

Had the Missouri desperado already given up to its strange influence?

These were questions that kept intruding themselves before his mind all the time.

Was success within his grasp?

He believed so.

At the same time there must be an awful stage of suspense until he could learn the result of his little game.

He listened.

Surely, if the powder was to act at all, it would have taken its work now.

There had also been a sufficiency of time for the dust to fully settle in the room, since there was no wind to stir it.

Curbing his impatience as best he could so that he might not attract attention, the detective sauntered out of the place.

Reaching the spot where he had left his companions, he received and answered their signal.

They had been impatiently awaiting him, and manifested their eagerness at his coming.

"Any sound from above, boys?" he asked.

"Nary a one, captain," answered Ben.

"Still as the grave," remarked Andy, *sotto voce*.

This sounded well.

It argued that his little scheme had been successful, and no doubt the terrible man from Missouri at that moment lay helpless on his cot, a victim to the wonderful powder.

There was nothing to keep Peleg from ascending the ladder.

He started to do so, crawling stealthily up, although he had no idea that any slight noise he might make would annoy the party above.

Those below had the advantage of him.

They could watch his movements.

His figure was outlined against the sky, and all his movements could be plainly seen, in silhouette, of course.

They saw him reach the window.

Here he bent his head as though listening to discover whether any sound came from within.

All being apparently quiet, he began to slowly raise the window.

In his hand he had a stick some eighteen inches long, which he meant to use in propping up the sash, when he once had it up.

By degrees he raised the sash, and then adjusted the stick to hold it just so.

Those below saw him crawl through.

This was the period of suspense.

If Jesse James was awake good-bye to Mr. Peleg Smith; he might as well say his prayers.

What was that?

A head projected from the window.

"Ahoy—Andy—Ben!"

It was Peleg calling.

"Hello, there, captain!"

"Come up here and bring the pieces of rope along."

The two men uttered exclamations.

"Is he safe?" asked Ben.

"Have we got him?" queried Andy.

"He's helpless as a log—come up," was the reply.

CHAPTER XVII.

HARD LUCK.

In their haste to ascend the ladder the two miners came near having a catastrophe.

Luckily, hearing a suspicious crack, Ben had the sense to leap quickly backward to the ground again.

When he climbed up a minute later, and passed in through the window, he felt the ladder quiver under his weight, and knew its back had been broken under the strain.

After that there could be no telling what that execrable ladder might not be guilty of doing.

When Ben managed to snake his corpulent frame through the open window, he found his companions in the dark.

"Where are ye?" he asked.

"This way, Ben," came a voice.

He stepped forward.

Then tripping over some object he fell.

Possibly such actions disturbed some of the fine dust that had settled about.

At any rate as he arose he began to sneeze.

"By George, I believe (schew) I've got a beastly (schew) dose of that confounded (schew) powder. Hope (schew) it won't lay me out (schew)."

Poor Ben sneezed loud enough to awaken the Seven Sleepers, and it seemed as though he would never get over it.

There was no movement on the part of the form on the couch.

It looked as though the ex-guerrilla must have gotten a good dose.

By degrees Ben's ardor calmed down.

He sneezed less frequently, the violent discharge of air becoming a peculiar snort.

"What are you doing, captain?" he managed to ask between attacks.

"Tying our man's hands, so as to make sure work of him," came the reply.

"Why don't you strike a light?"

Why indeed?

It seemed singular that this had not been done, but Peleg's answer explained it all.

"Wait till we get him secure. Then, if he comes to his senses suddenly he can't do much."

"Oh, yes, I see."

"I'm nearly done; got eleven lengths of the rope around his hand, and I'm securing it now. I reckon he can't break that."

An elephant could not.

It showed what fear men had for the party who bore the name of Jesse James.

He was the terror who walked by night—the pestilence that stalked by noonday.

Another dozen seconds elapsed.

"There, I've got it fastened."

Peleg spoke this.

"Shall I strike a match, captain?"

"Hold on," quickly.

"What now?"

"Andy?"

"Here."

"You forgot something."

"Did I, captain?"

"You haven't searched him."

"Me search him—for what?"

"Any weapons. Once he is relieved of them the chances of his doing mischief will be lessened."

"Just so."

"Then do the job."

"Right it is."

Another period of impatient waiting.

"Well, Andy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you done the job?"

"Reckon I have."

"Found anything?"

There was a chuckle.

"Reckon I have, captain."

"What is it?"

"First, a revolver, big enough to sink a warship at close range."

"Good. That's the very pistol he's done so much deadly work with. Many a good man has gone down before it. Hand the thing over to me, Andy, this way."

The weapon exchanged hands.

"Anything more?"

"Yes, a sword of some kind."

"Reckon it's a Mexican machete."

"Right you are."

"That all?"

"Y-es."

Andy did not know that there was any need of mentioning the purse of gold dust he had run across, since that could hardly be classed under the name of weapon.

Hence he kept silent on that score.

"Raise the knife, Andy, and hold it over him. If he shows signs of fight when the light is struck, remember, we must and shoot. Don't give the desperate villain half a chance."

"That's right, captain."

"Is all ready?"

"In this quarter—yes," said Andy.

"Ditto here," from Ben.

"Then strike the match!"

It was a tableau.

Ben drew the match across the floor, and it started into a flame.

This he concealed for a few seconds by encircling with his hands, after the manner of a smoker, until the wood caught fire.

Then he held the flaming match up.

The scene was dramatic.

Both Andy and Peleg bent over the man on the floor with threatening weapons.

Their eyes were at once glued on his face.

What did they see that glued their gaze there almost petrified them?

The man did not move a limb—he lay there as though perfectly dead.

Well, this was what they had expected—then should a spasm of alarm pass over their frames, they held their breath in awe.

They had reason.

The man lying there had undoubtedly succumbed to the influence of the powder.

"Great Scott!" gasped Ben.

Peleg ground his teeth.

"It's the wrong man!" he gritted.

"You made a mistake, then?" queried Andy, gazing upon the snow-white hair and beard of a veteran miner lying there.

The detective turned upon them.

"Not I, you fool! The mistake lies at your door."

"Eh? How is that?" gasped Ben.

"Yes, explain," from Andy.

Peleg nodded his head sarcastically.

"It's a puzzle, eh? Well, I don't think it will when I have said a few words. Listen to me, it ain't the room."

He spoke the words in a shrill whisper that penetrated like a knife.

"Surely——" began Ben.

"I'd be willing to wager——" started Andy.

"Silence! If you had looked around—here, strike!"

ther match, man—I think I saw a candle somewhere near by."

The match flared up.

"Ah! here it is—that's it—now we have more of a permanent light. Cast your eyes around. What do you see—any of the furniture piled against the door? Not a bit of it. Everything is in its place. That proves what I said—that this is not the right room."

"How was the mistake made?"

"Yes, tell us that, Peleg."

"You put the ladder at the wrong window."

The two men looked at each other in a peculiar, crestfallen way.

They no doubt realized that what their leader said was the truth.

All the blame lay on them.

"Where is the right room?"

Peleg Smith cocked his revolver over his shoulder, and said:

"The corner one. This adjoins it at the end of the hall. You failed to see the first window, and came to this one."

Very simple the mistake was, and how easily made—even the most stupid man could see it now.

They were very crestfallen.

"Can't we remedy it?"

"Is it too late, Peleg?"

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"Such a blunder discourages one, but I am willing to try for it. We have our man hemmed in, and I don't know how he can well escape."

His words gave them courage.

All was not lost.

They began to realize the truth of the old adage that "While there is life there's hope."

It was wonderful to see how they picked up and showed new animation.

"Show us what to do, Peleg."

"Yes, and we'll retrieve the disaster."

The detective, with a glance at the man who was under the influence of the peculiar powder, shook his head.

"I'm afraid he's done for. The dose was strong even for a man of Jesse James' years and build."

"Well, accidents will happen. We'll leave the window open, and the air may revive him."

With that he blew out the candle.

Wetting his fingers he extinguished the red spark that was left on the wick.

Darkness came.

"Make for the window—quietly, now."

"Beware of that plaguey ladder," said Ben.

"Yes, it's going to betray us yet," from Andy.

Peleg climbed over the sill.

He reached the ground in safety, and, without paying any attention to his comrades, moved over to where he had believed the proper window ought to be.

Sure enough, he found it.

His men had made just the mistake he supposed, in the darkness.

Was it too late to remedy the disaster?

At least they could try.

He waited for the others.

One got down and steadied the ladder for his more clumsy companion.

With much care the descent was finally effected, and they came over to Peleg.

"What next?" whispered Andy.

"Give us orders," said Ben.

"Do you see the reflection of the stars on that glass up above?"

"Surely."

"No mistake about that."

"That's the window you should have discovered some time back."

"Yes—and the ladder?"

"Shall we bring it here, captain?"

"Do so. Meanwhile I will remain and keep an eye on the window, for fear you might make another mistake."

Even in his whisper the sarcasm was felt.

They went for the ladder.

This was placed in position without trouble, and then all was ready.

"Ben!"

"Yes, captain."

"It is your turn."

"At what?"

"To go up and investigate."

Ben began to shiver.

He had not dreamed of this before.

The thought of following a lead did not give him half as much trouble as the idea of being the one to go ahead.

"This is unexpected, captain," he whispered.

"But only fair," insisted Andy, shrewd Andy, who knew it would be his turn next, but did not believe the time would arrive.

There are occasions when it pays to be third.

Ben groaned.

"He's sure to be awake after all the row we've been and made," he muttered.

"Just as likely as not, but some one has to lead, and the captain has selected you because of your well-known daring."

Sly Andy—he mixed a lump of sugar with the bitter dose, and Ben felt the effects.

"I'll wager he's sitting there covering the window with his shooter, and ready to extinguish any fool who shows his head," he groaned again.

"Perhaps so, but it is your turn. All must take their chances. Lead on."

Ben gave it up.

"I suppose if I must, I must. Bury me under the daisies, boys. Here goes."

Like a martyr going to the stake, he took hold and began to ascend the ladder.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLOSE QUARTERS.

With a heavy heart Ben ascended.

Had his feet been incased in the leaden shoes of a submarine diver he could hardly have gone up the ladder more slowly.

It only needed the passage of a few rounds, when he came to the window.

Here was the ticklish point.

If there was danger, he must find it now.

A brilliant thought came.

Those below could not judge how high up he went, and would have to take his word for it.

Why should he raise his head above the sill at all when he could do better?

As all was darkness beyond, his eyes would not serve him.

He raised one hand cautiously and began to feel above him.

The window was raised half a foot for the admission of air.

This seemed satisfactory.

He had learned enough to make a report, and embellish it as he pleased.

Down Ben went to the bottom of the ladder, and with such haste that the vehicle of his descent groaned under his weight.

"Softly," whispered Peleg, touching his arm.

"He ain't after you," said Andy.

He turned his back contemptuously upon his comrade, and faced the detective.

"What luck?" asked the latter.

"The window is half open."

"Yes."

"I listened as well as I could, and felt pretty sure I heard his heavy breathing."

"Which accounted for the rapidity of your descent."

"Oh, I was simply in a hurry to report that everything seems favorable."

"That's it, eh? Well, Andy, it's your turn."

Andy groaned.

Ben chuckled.

"What am I to do?"

"Yes; what have you cut out for bold Andy?" asked Ben, with more sarcasm.

"Perhaps it would be just as well for one of us to enter the room and settle the fellow."

"Good Heavens!" gasped Ben.

"Excuse me," hoarsely whispered Andy.

Peleg had had his grim joke, and he now returned to business again.

"Never mind. Since the opportunity offers, I'll charge my tube again, and repeat the game."

"Wisely said, captain."

"An excellent plan, surely."

Both breathed easier.

They would as soon have thought of bearding a full-grown wounded grizzly in his mountain den as Jesse James in his room.

Either meant death, nor was the one any more certain than the other.

"Then await me here."

After stepping to the light, and again filling the little tube with the magic powder, Peleg Smith mounted the ladder.

Those below could calmly contemplate another running the risk they sought to avoid, but when the danger was brought home to them it was quite another thing.

Still, nothing happened.

The detective puffed the powder into the room, but he could not catch the "heavy breathing" that had come so

plainly to Ben, and believed it must have existed in latter's imagination.

Down he came.

Another period of waiting ensued.

When the time was up, Peleg Smith climbed the ladder and entered the room.

He could hear no sound.

No one had ever accused this man of cowardice, his actions proved it now.

He took out a match.

It ignited without any of the crackling, explosive sound that distinguishes all our matches at the present day.

When it flared up, he used it as a torch, and looked around him.

One glance was enough.

He made for the window.

"Boys!"

"Ah! there, captain!"

"Done for."

"Dead?"

"Kicked the flume?"

Peleg gave a grunt of disgust.

"Skipped."

The men below groaned.

"Come up—you, Ben, with that candle;" for he thrust the latter article into the pocket of the other, extinguishing it.

They made a break.

So did the ladder.

It came apart a yard or so from the bottom, and consequently Ben was left hanging to the window while Andy and the ladder became mixed up on the ground.

A little confusion ensued.

The ladder had in some way managed to strike on the head.

He thought he had been shot, and that his brains were oozing out.

So he lay there kicking and grunting, while Peleg squirmed above, endeavoring to get one leg up over the window, when he could draw himself into the apartment.

This he finally succeeded in doing.

Peleg called to the man below.

"Get up, you fool. It was only the ladder broke."

Andy ceased groaning.

"Then I ain't shot?"

"Not a bit of it."

Andy got up.

"Raise the ladder and see how high it comes."

He did so.

The ladder was simply shortened several feet, a break, which had come at the second round.

It was still long enough for practical purposes.

"Remain below, Andy."

"All right, captain, though if you want me to reckon I can get up."

"No, stay where you are, and if your man jumps, fasten on to him like a leech."

"Thunder!"

This made Andy uneasy again.

He forgot to rub his bruises, but, grasping his revolver, he crouched like a tiger at the base of the broken ladder, ready to riddle the dreaded outlaw should he suddenly confront him.

Meanwhile Ben had produced the candle.

Another match was ignited.

The room lay about them.

It was empty.

Against the door was a heavy box, used as a sort of presser, since it had a small handglass on it, and the presence of this was indicative of the fact that Jesse James could not possibly have gone out that way.

How, then?

The window?

Such a thing was probable.

As soon as darkness fell, and just before the men set to work, he might have crawled out of this aperture and dropped to the ground.

Such a fall, when taken purposely, was not a terrible thing at all.

Doubtless to an agile man it would be a mere nothing.

Peleg Smith pondered.

He was used to tricks of all kinds, and an idea entered his head.

What if the man had not left the room at all?

True, he was not on the bed.

That did not prevent him from being under it or in hiding somewhere.

With the candle in one hand and his revolver in the other he bent down to see.

Ben also dropped on his hands and knees.

It was hard to get their heads low enough to make out what was under the bed.

At the first attempt their heads came together with quite a crack.

Each looked reproachfully at the other, and Ben began rubbing his cranium as he moved back like a crab retreating.

Then they tried it again.

At this instant the door of a closet standing close by moved open.

It made no sound.

A man's figure took a step forward.

He seemed to grasp the situation.

Being at the foot of the cot he was enabled to approach them closely.

"Do you see anything, Ben?" asked the detective.

"Some old clothes, I reckon they are, and yet——"

"It might be a man."

"Just so."

"Suppose you crawl under and give it a kick."

Ben inserted his legs under the bed.

Then he gave a vicious kick.

A groan followed.

"Jupiter! it's him, sure enough."

Ben grew excited, and even the cool detective showed signs of excitement.

"Don't look like a man."

"Didn't you hear him groan?"

"Yes. Crawl under and get him out, Ben. I reckon he's half senseless from the powder. I'll keep you covered and send a few bullets if there's any danger."

"Into me?" wildly.

"No, no; into Jesse James. I guess his goose is cooked this time, thank fortune."

"I hate to handle him without gloves," said the righteous Ben, to cover quite another feeling that pervaded his system.

"Nonsense. In with you."

"Well, here goes."

Thereupon a scrambling ensued.

Burly Ben was crawling under the bed, and he found it a tough task, too.

Peleg continued to bend down and watch, although feeling the effects of the dust his companion was raising.

"Got him?" he asked, hearing his man utter some sort of exclamation.

"Got the devil!" came the startling reply.

"What's the matter, Ben?"

"It ain't him."

"Who is it, then?"

"Nobody."

"What! isn't there a man under there?"

"Nary a man, only some old clothes."

"But the groan."

"Yes, the groan."

"How do you explain that?"

"I don't attempt to. This here place is haunted. Let me get out. Fire and furies, here I am stuck under the bed and unable to back water. Take hold of my legs and pull, for mercy's sake."

Peleg could hardly help smiling, despite the serious nature of the position.

There were several strange things connected with the case that he wanted explained, but they would have to await their turn.

Just at present Ben's condition seemed about the first thing to need attention.

He placed candle and revolver on the floor.

Then he seized hold of the great boots of the miner and took a firm grip.

"Ready, Ben?"

"Yes."

"Then altogether, yo heave oh, here we go!"

Peleg was wrong.

They did not go.

Just as he was exerting himself to make a good strong pull, something not down on the programme occurred.

The man who had issued from the closet was Jesse James, and he had escaped all the ill effects of the powder germs while hiding there, his ear close up to a crack, to catch all sounds coming from the adjoining room.

At this critical juncture, with one sweep of his hand he snatched the bed clothes up and cast them over Peleg, his candle and revolver.

The light was instantly extinguished—so was Peleg.

Having accomplished this feat, the hunted outlaw threw himself upon the man under the covers and pounded him unmercifully.

The detective struggled desperately, but he was all wrapped up in the bed clothes and could offer but little resistance when Jesse James pitched him into the closet, still bundled up, and fastened the door with a tipped-up chair.

Then the outlaw made for the window.

Having discomfited his foes, he was now bent upon making his escape.

Andy's turn was next.

How would he fare?

CHAPTER XIX.

JESSE JAMES' LIGHT.

At this juncture, those in the house below must have thought a madman had broken loose somewhere.

Ben, under the bed, realizing that evil had befallen his leader, and believing Jesse James would surely murder him where he lay, stuck there like a pig under a fence, began to roar lustily for help.

At the same time he beat his heels upon the floor, making a lively tattoo.

To add to the general confusion, the two men out in the passage-way, who had been stationed there to watch the door, and shoot the outlaws if they appeared, considered this an invitation to join in the fracas.

They recognized Ben's lusty voice, and supposed, of course, that worthy must be meeting death by inches to make such an uproar.

Consequently, they hurled themselves against the door of the barricaded room, and began to add to the clamor by kicking it open.

In the midst of all this racket, Jesse James began to make his exit.

He climbed out of the window, feet first.

Knowing that the ladder must be somewhere below, he reached for it.

At first his feet failed to strike it.

Lowering himself a little more, success attended his effort.

He found a support.

Without a second's delay, the man swung himself down the ladder.

He did not forget Andy.

That worthy was crouching below, his finger on the trigger; not being sure whether the party descending was friend or foe, he was only waiting for some action to make his decision.

The man sprang to the ground.

Now was the time.

"Who is it?" he demanded.

"Andy?" came a voice.

"Yes, captain."

"Where are you, man?"

"Here, right in front of you."

"Ah! yes. Take that."

As he spoke, the desperado sprang suddenly upon other, and dealt him several terrific blows.

Not expecting such treatment, of course the man poorly prepared for it.

He could only utter a cry when he was struck in the face, and knocked over.

The ladder fell on him a second time, and added to misfortunes.

Jesse James had gained his liberty, and was now to go where he pleased.

Men were rushing around the tavern.

Those inside had made for the open air, as if fearing that a magazine was about to explode.

To avoid them, Jesse James could have sprung away, but they did not know him, and he at once mingled with the crowd, desirous of seeing what came of this queer affair.

When he thought it prudent to retire, he did not doubt that he could slip away unperceived.

The men above succeeded in bursting open the door and entering the room.

A light was struck.

Poor Ben was groaning dismally under the bed, and their first move was to drag him out.

Before he could offer a word in explanation, a noise was heard in the closet.

When the chair was knocked away the door opened and Peleg stalked into view, dragging the bed-covers after him, as they had in some manner become fastened to his person.

Peleg looked as though he had been through the mill—his hair was all topsy-turvy, and his right eye turned black, while his face was streaked with blood, for the desperado had struck heavily, and only for the sheltered by the bed-covers, Smith might have even been knocked senseless while in chancery.

He held one hand to his bleeding nose, while the other groped for a handkerchief.

Peleg was game, however.

He had not lost all sense of the ridiculous, and although in no condition for enjoyment, could not keep a smile from crossing his face.

"Well, Ben, we're left," he said.

"Yes," returned that worthy, with one hand rubbing his back, and the other doing a like service for his stomach, "that seems to be about the fit of it, captain, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Brave Andy has gobbled him up."

Peleg started.

"I had quite forgotten the man. Perhaps——"

Without finishing the sentence he ran over to the window and leaned out.

"Andy!"

A hollow groan welled up.

"Are you dead, old man, I say?"

"Pretty nigh it."

"Where's the villain?"

"Gone, captain, after near murderin' me."

"That's bad."

"What's all this row about?"

One of the men who had gathered around Andy, put is question.

"We were trying to trap the prince of outlaws and got it in the lurch," responded Peleg.

"Who was that?"

"A certain man named Jesse James."

At the mention of that name various exclamations rose, for it was well known.

Besides, the news of the affair experienced on the preceding night at Battle Mountain had been carried near and far, and the terror of that name was something beyond all precedent.

Indignant shouts arose.

Peleg saw he had the sympathy of all present, and quickly he called upon them to spread out and look for the man who had escaped.

Here was a decided sensation in the camp.

From mouth to mouth the word was passed along, and soon became known all over Blue Blazes Bar that the notorious man from Missouri had been in their midst.

Torches blazed.

Shouts rang out.

The mining camp was in a furor.

It began to look as though there might be a repetition of the previous night's *mêlée* at Battle Mountain, when Jesse James defied the whole community to take him.

The outlaw knew this was no safe spot for him, and was not long in leaving the crowd he had joined.

His day's rest had done him a world of good, although now found himself hungry, and with no means of satisfying his appetite.

Well armed, and determined to resist arrest to the utmost, he made up his mind to pass out from among the cabins and hide himself in the mountains somewhere.

Just as he was passing one of the last houses a hand was laid on his arm.

"Don't shoot, Jesse," came a voice just in time.

He recognized it.

"Frank!"

"On deck, old hoss."

They had agreed to meet at the Bar, and when the others failed to show up he began to believe they must have been pursued and forced into taking some other route.

"Where are the rest of the boys?"

"In this cabin. It belongs to Bill Price—you remember him. We met him on the outskirts of the camp and he knew us. He said there was a hot feeling against us here on account of what we had done over the mountain, and that we had better hide in his cabin, while he went out to look for you."

"Isn't Bill in now?"

"No, he hasn't come back. I hear a lot of those crazy miners bearing this way. Guess we'd do well to go in, too."

They did so.

The miners, instead of going past, halted in front of the cabin and waved their torches.

"Surround the house."

"This is Bill's place."

"They used to be great chums years ago, and if anybody knows about 'em it's Bill."

"No quarter!"

"Death to the outlaws!"

Such cries from the angry crowd showed the state of their feelings.

The miners of Feather River were aroused by the bold deeds of Jesse James and his crew, and intended making things so hot for the scoundrels that they would be glad to shake the dust of California from their feet, and migrate back to the State that had been the scene of their work.

In some way or other they had struck upon the exact truth.

It was a happy inspiration on the part of some genius.

The men they sought were in Bill's cabin, but they did not intend to stay there long.

Realizing that their retreat was known, and that with each passing minute the danger must increase until they would find themselves in a terrible pickle, the quartet quickly resolved to rush out and stampede the group of men who had taken upon themselves the task of surrounding the suspected cabin.

With Jesse James at the head, they suddenly appeared in the midst of the miners.

The flickering light of the torches illuminated the scene, and showed those nearest them the four fierce outlaws, each one grasping a revolver in either hand.

Loud cries were heard.

All eyes turned in that direction.

The sight petrified those men, although they were not unused to scenes of violence—still, there was something so fierce in the bristling appearance of these desperadoes that stamped them demons.

Would they have to cut their way through?

It would not be a difficult task.

The encircling line was small, and those deadly revolvers would soon decrease it.

The awe-inspiring presence of Jesse James, coupled with the vivid remembrance of his terrible reputation, prevented any one of the men from making a fool of himself.

"If any man of you is in a hurry to die, let him get in the way of Jesse James."

No one moved.

The party who would have been willing enough was at the tavern organizing his men for a grand hunt, and heard not the challenge.

Still facing their foes, the four Missourians began to retrograde, backing out of camp.

They kept their array of weapons leveled, and each man among the miners seemed to feel that he was covered by all the revolvers, so that none of them dared to move.

Backing still farther, the little squad of defiant outlaws gradually became swallowed up in the darkness beyond. Suddenly they vanished.

It was as though a black curtain had been let down between the foes.

The miners were released from the queer spell—some people call it fear—that had appeared to weigh heavily upon them.

They immediately set up a shout.

Answering calls came.

Men flocked to the spot to hear what had been discovered.

The news was soon made public, and the wildest excitement ensued.

It really began to look as though these men were possessed of the evil character which some persons ascribed to them, and that no mortal would ever be able to kill them.

Enough bullets had been fired at the James boys to supply a regiment, and yet they lived.

Satan protects his own, sometimes, and if one-half that has been related of them could be true, surely these ex-guerrillas must be favorites of the old gentleman who resides in Hades.

An organized hunt was begun.

Scores of men formed searching parties, and a systematic hunt was the result.

The result?

Just what might have been expected.

They did not find those they sought, and yet many days had passed by they heard of them from other direction.

Peleg Smith discharged his deputies.

When the first report came of the James boys appearing at another point, he posted off in hot speed, mined to be in at the death if the outlaws met them in the Golden State.

* * * * *

After their escape from the clutches of the miners the Bar, the four Missourians had the whole of California spread out before them.

They could go where they wished.

At the same time danger was at their door, for man's hand was raised against them.

They kept together and managed to reach the skirts of San Francisco.

Here the quartet of rascals separated.

Silas Barker and Tom Twiggs took passage on a vessel for Panama, where they could make their way to Orleans.

The James boys had a different plan in view, and their first thought was to get a good mount.

They bought rifles and a complete outfit, for a long and dangerous journey lay ahead.

At this time, a few years after the Civil War, the stretching between Missouri and California, where the overland mail ran, were the hunting grounds of the Indians, and it was always a matter of life and death for white men to cross, even when in large companies.

No one but a daring soul would have ever dreamed of crossing this vast stretch of wild country, with a single companion, and yet this was the plan Jesse had conceived.

Every necessary article was purchased, but no horses, for their horses could not stand being overloaded.

If any two men on earth were capable of accomplishing this feat, it was the James boys.

It is not our purpose to follow them closely.

They met with adventures.

Through them all the wonderful nerve that had distinguished these border ruffians carried them, till at the end they appeared once more in their old haunts.

THE END.

Next week's JESSE JAMES STORIES (No. II) will contain "Jesse James Among the Moonshiners; or, Train Robbers' Trail in Kentucky."

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